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The Isle of Whispers

A Tale of the New England Seas

BY

E. LAWRENCE DUDLEY

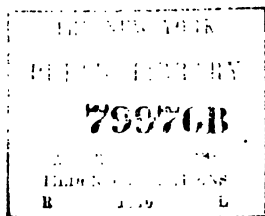


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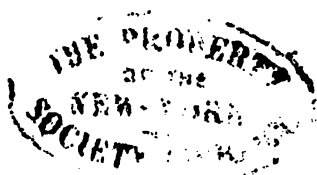
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TO
E. D.,
THE SOMETIME OWNER
OF THE *REBECCA*,
UPON THE DECKS OF WHICH
THIS STORY WAS FIRST CONCEIVED

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THE ISLE OF WHISPERS

THE ISLE OF WHISPERS

CHAPTER I

CONCERNING A THEFT

"THERE's a bit of wind coming, Mr. Renfrew."

"From what quarter?"

"Nor'east."

I rose from the cabin table with its litter of papers, and stumbled up the companionway. Simpson, my skipper, pointed over the starboard rail.

"There it is, sir; and I shouldn't wonder but what a storm was lyin' somewhere back of it. The glass has been fallin' steady for the last half hour."

I looked at the widening patch of ruffled water behind us, then ahead, at the dim point of land which quivered hazily on the outer verge of the glassy sea.

"What's that? Martha's Vineyard?"

"No, sir. The Vineyard's further over this way—to the west'ard. They call that the Isle of Whispers."

"The Isle of Whispers? I've never heard of it before."

"I doubt if you have, sir. It's only a bundle of rocks, with a few acres of real estate scattered over 'em; and, besides, it lies quite a ways out o' the usual course—some twenty miles off the nearest land."

I raised the marine glasses, and leveled them on the island with languid interest. The rocks, detaching themselves from the blur of distance, stood out gaunt and desolate in the warm June sunshine.

"Is it inhabited?" I asked.

"Yes, sir—or, leastways, they say it is. But the people—there's only a family or two—live by themselves, like hermits, never comin' ashore, or havin' anything to do with the rest of the world."

"Rather a monotonous life, don't you think?" I dropped the glasses on a seat. "How did it ever get its name?"

"From some queer echo you can hear on it—or so I've been told."

The yacht lurched into the trough of the lazy sea. Simpson gave the wheel a quick turn. The reef-points beat out a noisy tattoo against the sails; and, above us, the slackened halyards whipped sharply about the mastheads. A hot afternoon sun fell with merciless force on the deck; and the air was lifeless. A sense of stagnation seemed to hang over all.

I glanced astern. The ruffled patch of water had

spread out fanshaped, closing in upon the *Naravido* on both sides; and beyond, on the horizon's edge, low banks of cloud were rising swiftly.

"Fog?" I questioned.

"It looks so. We've had the devil's own luck, sir."

"How far are we from New Bedford?"

"Some seventy miles, as the crow flies; but Heaven knows——"

A puff of wind caught the mainsail; and the schooner heeled over. The smooth green waters began to slip past us. I looked at my watch.

"It's four o'clock now. Do you think I'll be able to get the 10:30 for Boston? If I don't catch the midnight, I'll never reach New York to-morrow morning."

"I know it, sir; but it's very uncertain. This fog sort o' complicates matters; and with a storm brewin', too, I can't guarantee anythin'."

"Isn't there some place where you can put me ashore?"

"No place nearer than the Vineyard; and the last boat left for the mainland an hour ago."

There seemed to be nothing for it but to contain myself in patience. But even patience was to be sorely tried; for, after a moment of fitfulness, the wind died out entirely, and the yacht returned to her futile wallowing in the swells.

Simpson muttered an imprecation. The grim

humor of the situation dawned on me; and I laughed aloud.

"You'd have done much better, sir," he said reprovingly, "if you'd taken my advice, and gone ashore somewhere up the Cape. You'd have got to Boston to-night, at any rate."

"Yes; even walking is preferable to lying out here."


Simpson scowled politely; his sense of humor was deficient. I turned into the companionway.

"Let me know if anything happens," I said as I went below.

The heat in the cabin was stifling. I ordered the steward to bring me a whisky and soda, then sat down before the pile of papers on the table. A yellow telegram—that telegram which had reached me in the little Cape Cod seaport, and had been the cause of my sudden departure—lay on the top of the heap. I picked it up and read it for the twentieth time.

"Market smashed. Firm going to the wall. Come at once. Finn."

I studied the name with a frowning brow; and for the twentieth time wondered why the telegram had been signed by a clerk in the office, and not by my partner, James Prescott. It seemed strange that the despatch of such a message as this should have been left to an under man. I could not believe that the slight was intentional; and from that fact alone the words before me took on a special significance.



Prescott must have been pushed hard if he could not have found time to wire me himself.

I knew that he would not have sent for me unless the need were urgent. He was not the man to be easily frightened; the ordinary fluctuations of the market held no terrors for him. When I had left home two weeks before, stocks were on a general rise, and everything was booming; the occasional newspapers which I had been able to get had given no indications of change; and yet, with a swiftness which was appalling, the blow had fallen. And we had been caught in the crash.

Our firm was a young one—Prescott had barely turned forty, while I was five years his junior; but in our eight years of partnership we had both acquired comfortable incomes—as witness my possession of the *Naravido*. Who knew? Perhaps she was my only negotiable asset now.

The thought was not a pleasing one; and, turning to the papers before me, I once more worked out the dreary computation of my chances. The result was disheartening. By the most conservative estimate I was a pauper; ruin and the bankruptcy courts hovered perilously near.

I remembered with a pang the fifty thousand New York Railway 5s which had been my last purchase. I had bought them as a holding investment for the firm at Prescott's suggestion; for, like most men who make money easily, we had hitherto taken

no thought of the proverbial rainy day. But, as it chanced, the rainy day had arrived before we were ready for it; and this first nucleus of our savings would be but a drop in the flood of liquidation. Prescott's spirit of prophecy had come a few years too late.

Ah, well! There was an old saying about spilt milk. Spent money might be classed favorably with it. I was not going to cry until the cause for tears was made plain. More fortunate than Prescott, I was entirely unencumbered, without wife or family dependent on me. If the worst came to the worst, I could cease the cultivation of extravagant tastes, and begin at the bottom of the ladder again.

"Your highball, sir." The steward presented the drink with the deference of a well trained servant.

I drank it at a draught, and returned him the glass. But he still lingered.

"Might I have a word with you, Mr. Renfrew?" he asked.

"Certainly, Carton." I looked up in surprise. "What's the matter?"

"It's that sailor, sir."

"What sailor?"

"The one we shipped this morning, to take the place of Svenson. He and the cook had a little fracas in the galley just now, and the cook got rather an ugly cut on the arm."

"A cut? From what?"

"The sailor's knife, sir."

"He had no right to be carrying one."

"I know, sir. But he *was*, nevertheless."

I scowled. "What caused the trouble?"

"It was like this, sir. The cook had been taking the air on deck, leaving the galley empty. When he went back he found the sailor just coming out of the after passageway—the one that runs to your stateroom. He told him to get out, but the man showed fight, and they had a lively set-to for a minute or so. Then the sailor drew his knife and slashed the cook's arm."

Here was another thing to worry me—as though the day had not held its complement! "It looks as though he had meant to rob me."

"It does indeed, sir. You see, he could wait his chance until the galley was clear, and then steal through from the fo'c'stle."

"Was he carrying anything when the cook caught him?"

"I don't know, sir; at any rate, he didn't leave anything behind."

I sprang to my feet. "Well, we'll easily find out," I grunted, striding to the stateroom door.

The room was in a litter. Every drawer in the place had been pulled out and ransacked; the best part of my wardrobe lay heaped up on the floor. I looked back at Carton, who had followed me.

"He didn't take much care to conceal his intentions."

"I'm thinking his intentions were discovered, sir, before he had time to take much care."

We went over the things systematically.

"There seems to be nothing missing," I said, as I closed the last drawer.

"Except what was in this, sir." And Carton, who had been feeling under the berth, brought forth an empty box.

It was the case in which I had kept a favorite revolver. I gazed at it ruefully.

"It's gone, sure enough, and——" A memory flashed upon me—"Yes—and that sailor knew it was here! He was at the wheel when I was telling Simpson about it in the cockpit this morning."

"That must be it, sir. You don't happen to remember whether it was loaded?"

"I'm sure it wasn't—but wait." I took a box of cartridges from the washstand cupboard, and counted them carefully. "No—they're all here."

"It's just as well, sir—with one of his temper."

I pondered for a moment, then turned to the door leading into the passageway. "I think I'll have a little talk with him."

"Very good, sir. But I advise you not to get him mad."

The cook, seated on a stool by the galley fire, was nursing his wounded arm. I expressed concern that

the trouble had happened, and offered the services of my medicine chest to alleviate his pain. But he seemed disposed to treat both the trouble and the injury lightly.

"It's not the cut that's bothering me," he growled. "But the nerve of that young devil in taking my best meat knife to do it with!" And he pointed to a long, keen blade, which lay, stained and discolored, upon the floor.

The mystery of the knife was solved, at any rate. Smiling at the cook's whimsical inconsequence, I crossed to the forward bulkhead, and opened the forecastle door.

A head appeared from the nearest bunk; and a pair of black eyes looked out at me. It was the man whom I wanted. I closed the door, leaning my weight against the panel.

"Get up," I ordered. "I wish to have a word with you."

He scrambled sulkily to his feet. I studied him for a moment in silence. Compact, well-built, he would have been no mean antagonist in a tussle; even through his white jumper I could see the muscles standing out upon his arms. His head, firmly poised on his shoulders, was thrown back in a natural attitude of unconcern, giving a suggestion of self-reliance; the mouth and the chin showed a strength of purpose seldom met with in one of his sphere of life. His features were dark—almost

swarthy. In the feminine mind they might have been classed as handsome. But I fancied a gleam of cruelty smoldering in the eyes, which gave a sinister expression to his face.

"What's your name?" I began.

"William Blakeley."

"Where do you hail from?"

"Anywhere—nowhere. I have no home."

"Have you ever served on a yacht before?"

He nodded.

"Then perhaps you know it's not quite the thing to make free of the owner's quarters—to steal his possessions?"

"Steal?"

"Well, borrow, if you like the word better. Come, my man, I know what you've been up to. You might as well give me back my revolver."

He smiled faintly. "I haven't got it."

"It's gone from my stateroom."

"Very possibly. But still, I haven't got it."

"Where is it, then?"

"How should I know?" He shrugged his shoulders with an air of polite indifference. "Hasn't it struck you that you may have come to the wrong person?"

I looked at him in wonder. He was speaking to me as to an equal—with the easy assurance of a gentleman. In both language and manner there was a strong hint of the well-bred man of the world.

"I think not," I answered.

"I stand corrected. But might I ask where you got your information?"

"From Larabee, the cook."

"From the cook? Yes; it would be only natural."

The innuendo was not to be mistaken. "I have every confidence in him," I asserted. "He has been in my employ for several years."

"While I have been with you for scarcely a day, as yet. I can hardly blame you for taking his word."

His assurance was so perfect that, for an instant, I doubted my own convictions.

"You seem to know a good deal about it," I suggested meaningly.

"Perhaps I do."

"Then return the revolver, and we'll call the matter settled."

"I can't return what I haven't got," he reiterated. "And as you're not likely to take *my* word for it just at present, you may prove it to your own satisfaction." He came a step nearer and raised his hands above his head.

"That's not necessary." I drew back instinctively.

"Pardon me, but I'm afraid it is. You've charged me with a crime which I haven't committed. It's my right to clear myself as best I can."

There was nothing for it but to search him. I ran my hands over his clothing in a perfunctory fashion.

"This is my bunk," he continued; "and here's my kit." He opened a much-worn valise. "My baggage is not voluminous."

I went hurriedly through his things with an ever growing suspicion that he was making sport of me. As I had expected, the revolver was not to be found.

"Are you satisfied?" he demanded.

"I'm satisfied the revolver's still missing."

"Under the circumstances, that's all I can hope to prove."

He paused, as though to suggest that the interview was ended; but there was still one point left for him to explain.

"You've insinuated that the cook was the guilty person. Do you mean by that to deny that you were in the galley?"

"Not at all."

"Then how do you account for your presence there?"

"Wouldn't it follow naturally, if I were the pursuer and he the pursued?"

"Ah! But in that case you would hardly have been the attacking party."

"Perhaps he attacked me first."

"It's not likely. The use of the knife implies premeditation."

"Say luck, rather. At such times one takes whatever comes handiest."

"But legally——"

"Legally, self-defense is a sufficient plea."

"For the criminal?"

"For myself," he reminded me. "I was not referring to the cook."

"Indeed! I couldn't tell," I retorted. "But of course you have proof for what you allege?"

"As much as Larabee has to the contrary—my own statement. Let me repeat that it's simply his word against mine."

He spoke with the quiet conviction of one whose good faith had been thoroughly tested; and, though I doubted his story, I was forced to confess that he had at least the semblance of innocence on his side. My unavailing search for the revolver had raised a strong presumption in his favor; and he had been quick to take advantage of it by clearing himself at poor Larabee's expense. I had been fairly beaten on my own ground.

He saw my manifest irritation, and smiled complacently. I turned to the door with what dignity I could command.

"You're clever," I said; "much too clever for your present position. In New Bedford perhaps you will find employment better suited to your tastes."

He bowed slightly. "I shipped with you with that expectation."

I closed the door in his face.

When I returned to the cabin I found Simpson standing at the head of the companionway stair.

"The fog's shutting in, sir," he announced.

"Thick?"

"You couldn't cut it with a knife."

His report was not encouraging. I peered up through the skylight. A sodden curtain of mist seemed to have been let down suddenly upon the *Naravido*; long streamers, raveling from its edges, floated lazily above me, tearing themselves into ribbons as they curled about the shrouds and stays.

"Has she any way on her?"

"We've drifted a mile in the last hour."

"Then there's no hope of reaching New Bedford?"

"Not to-night."

His voice was tinged with an anxious sympathy. It had been in my mind to tell him of my little skirmish with the sailor, but in the face of his evident worry, I had not the heart to burden him with anything more. After all, the one question of importance was settled: the man had received his walking papers, and we would be rid of him to-mor-

row. Further than this Simpson himself could not go.

“ Was there something else, sir ? ” he inquired.

“ No—nothing,” I answered ; and thereby unwittingly sealed both his destiny and my own.

CHAPTER II

WHICH TREATS OF A CHANGE IN THE WIND

AN evening spent in pottering idleness about a yacht's cabin is a good excuse for the consumption of tobacco. Its only other merit, so far as I have discovered, is to make bedtime attractive. I turned in that night as the clock struck three bells.

My last conscious sensation was the monotonous rolling of the schooner; in the dozing state it became the restful motion of a cradle; dissolving into dreams, it led in natural sequence to my presence in a swing. It seemed as though Blakeley, the sailor, were pushing it; and, for a while, the swift flights through the air were exhilarating. But gradually a feeling of nausea crept over me; and I cried to him to stop. He burst into a thunder of laughter. I struck out at him viciously. He dodged; and I fell headlong to the ground.

I woke in a reeling world of blackness. The rush of great winds sounded above me. Some one was knocking on the stateroom door.

"What is it?" I shouted.

"Captain Simpson's compliments, sir," replied

Carton's voice; "and he says that the storm has broken."

"So it seems," I grunted, tumbling out of the berth. "I'll come at once."

I dressed with what speed a smoky candle and a pitching stateroom would permit me, and hurried on deck.

It was a night of tumult. A gale-ridden scud of cloud, driving the fog before it, raced across the sky. The wind screamed with fiendish anger in the rigging, as the yacht, like a maddened thing, plunged and lurched on her drunken course through the seas. Simpson's face, glowing dimly in the circle of the binnacle light, was the one fixed point in my line of vision; all else was a heaving, tumbling chaos of waves and foam.

I waited my chance; and, as the schooner whirled upward, I stumbled aft to his side.

"How long has it been going on?" I shouted.

"Ten minutes."

"Any sign of lessening?"

He shrugged his shoulders and pointed. I looked astern. The sea was in a welter of spume. In range upon range the long crested rollers broke from the darkness, sped after us, ran under our keel, swept by. One instant we clung to the dizzy heights of a mountain; the next we had slipped down the glassy slopes, and were floundering in the depths below. The tail of a wave crashed over the

railing, and drenched me. I shivered as I shook the water from my clothes.

"Too much sail," Simpson muttered.

"What are we carrying?"

"Double-reefed mainsail and jib. The jib's got to go, sir."

"All right; cut it loose."

He clutched the wheel with his knees, and waved his hands vehemently. A figure rose out of the shadows of the foredeck and staggered aft. At the same moment Carton's form appeared in the companionway. He beckoned. I crept over to him, brushing past the sailor in the gloom.

"Take the wheel," I heard Simpson order. "Keep her nor'west by north."

"What's the matter, Carton?" I asked.

"It's Larabee, sir. He wants to speak to you in the cabin."

I left him to fasten the doors behind me, and clambered down the stairs. The cook was waiting at the bottom.

"Come into the stateroom while I change my things," I suggested. "You can talk to me there."

He followed me with an ill-concealed air of importance.

"Well," I went on, throwing off my clothes, "what's the trouble now—another fight with Blakeley?"

"Not much, sir. But I've found out what he's been up to."

"You have? In what way?"

"I watched him through th' keyhole in th' fo'c'stle door," he said brazenly. "He come down a bit ago while th' rest o' th' men was all on deck, so I knew he was up t' nothin' good."

"Well?"

"Well, he first squinted round t' see if anybody was lookin'. Then he went over t' my bunk, an' begun feelin' under th' mattress. I couldn't tell rightly what he was doin', as the lamp was shinin' sort o' smoky like. But when he come back to his own bunk I saw that he had somethin' in his hand."

"What was it?"

"There was two things, sir. One I couldn't make out at all. Th' other was a revolver with shiny mountings—nickel, prob'bly."

"Silver," I corrected. "It must have been mine."

"So I judged, sir. At any rate, he begun t' ram it full o' cartridges. It seemed as if he was takin' 'em from th' other thing he had. Then he shoves the revolver into his clothes an' goes back t' my bunk, an' slips that other thing under my mattress again." Larabee paused.

"What next?"

"Nothin', except he went back on deck. An' I

went into th' fo'c'stle t' see what sort o' a prize package I'd drawn. Here it is."

He dragged another revolver from his pocket and handed it to me. I examined it with interest. It was a Colt repeater, but sadly battered and rusty. The hammer had been bent; half of the trigger was missing. As a firearm it was of no use at all.

I threw open the chambers. They were empty; but their caliber was that of my own revolver—thirty-two.

"You say he transferred the cartridges from one weapon to the other?" I demanded, getting into my oilskins.

"I said it *looked* as if he did. But, if I was t' swear to it——"

"You needn't," I cut him short. "Your word is enough."

The reason for the theft was made clear to me. Blakeley had broken his revolver, and needed another; hence he had taken mine. Whether he had trusted to luck that the calibers would be the same, or whether he had caught some chance remark in my conversation with Simpson, was a matter of pure conjecture. At any rate, he was no longer harmless, and must be dealt with gently. The case had assumed an aspect which I did not like. Thrusting the revolver into my pocket, I returned to the deck.

A sudden squall, lying in wait over the quarter, caught me as I emerged from the companionway,

and flung me back against the house. I tried to regain my balance. But the yacht gave a heavy lurch; and my feet slipped from under me. I brought up with a violent jerk against the cockpit seats.

The steersman laughed. I turned upon him angrily. Blakeley's eyes, shining in the binnacle lamp, were gazing down at me with a malicious gleam.

Under other circumstances, his appearance would have been providential. But, stung by his mirth, I threw all thought of caution to the winds, and strode up to him in a boiling rage.

"Get out of here," I cried. "Drop that wheel, and go forward where you belong."

He shook his head. "Captain's orders."

"Damn his orders! You take your orders from me."

"Indeed!"

The smile on his face drove me into utter recklessness. I sprang at him with raised fists. He saw the blow coming, and drew back quietly, giving the wheel a little twist before he let it go.

The yacht, shivering upon a crest, spun around dizzily, then plunged nose foremost into a towering wave. There was a splintering crash forward as the huge sea broke over her. I made a blind grab for the wheel; but Blakeley was already there.

"If anything has parted," he said, calmly work-

ing her into her course again, "I'm not the one to blame."

For the second time that day he had triumphed over me. Too angry for speech, I swung on my heel, and stumbled forward to see what damage had been done. Simpson and the men were struggling with a pile of wreckage.

"What was it?" I asked. "The bowsprit?"

"Knocked into kindling wood." Simpson swayed towards me. "But what's happened astern, sir? Is the steerin' gear smashed?"

"No—no. I'll explain later." I was beginning to feel ashamed of myself. "Get me an ax, and I'll see what I can do."

He gave me his, and guided me through the *débris*. The bowsprit had been broken off short where it entered the vessel, and was hanging in a tangle of ropes over the port bow. Two of the men were toiling like demons to cut it away, while the third tried to fend it off with a boathook; but, in spite of his efforts, it pounded back against the boarding with every roll of the schooner, threatening to stave a hole in her side. Simpson crept forward to look after some lashings. I leaned over the bulwark, and began to hack at the heavy jibstay.

It was no easy work in the inky darkness, with the yacht twisting under me, and the water breaking into a smother of spray over my head. But I

stuck to it doggedly, swinging the ax at the stubborn cable until the last strand had parted; and as I staggered to my feet, the skipper called to me that the spar was clear.

"But have you noticed the wind, sir?" he cried, bearing down on me. "It's veered to the south-'ard."

I raised my hand. We had been driving before a southeaster with the gale astern of us; but now it was sweeping in over the port rail.

"What does it mean?" I asked. "Fair weather?"

"Hanged if I know. I've never seen it act this way before." A sudden idea seemed to strike him, and he cupped his hands at his mouth. "What's your course?" he bellowed to Blakeley.

"Nor'west by north," came the answer.

"Hm! I thought p'rhaps he'd changed it."

"Perhaps he has."

Simpson shook his head decidedly. "Not him. He's a wonder at the wheel."

It was on the tip of my tongue to tell him of my suspicions; but he turned from me quickly.

"I'll just take a look at the glass," he said, disappearing down the forecastle hatch.

I watched him go, then crept aft myself to investigate. Blakeley saw me coming, and gave the wheel a swift turn. I was in time to catch a glimpse of the compass card swinging around into a north-

west direction. The man met me with a sarcastic grin.

"What do you mean by shifting the course?" I demanded angrily.

"It isn't shifted." He pointed to the binnacle.

"The card didn't read that way a moment ago."

"Oh, didn't it? Perhaps there's something wrong with the compass." He leaned over, as though to look at it; then calmly blew out the binnacle light.

I drew back, startled by his sudden action. The wheel creaked in the darkness; and I could feel the wind again pouring in over the port rail. I shook myself together.

"Quit that!" I cried, making a dive at him.

He threw me off roughly. "Keep your distance. I'm running this boat—not you."

"Oh, you are, are you? Well, we'll see about that."

"Yes, we *will* see about it." He raised his arm with a swift motion; and something shone dully in his hand. "You forget that I borrowed your pistol," he said quietly.

I paused in the act of calling for assistance, and stood rooted to the deck. The hammer clicked ominously in the darkness. I started. Blakeley heard me, and chuckled. Little shivers began to run up and down my spine.

A moment passed—another—and still he covered me. Then there came a loud cry from the fore-deck; and he lowered the gun.

“Thanks for waiting,” he laughed. “I won’t detain you.”

But I took his permission for granted, and sped forward. At the galley hatch I ran into Simpson’s arms.

“What is it?”

“Breakers ahead!” He stumbled past me. “Keep her off!” he yelled to Blakeley. “Keep her off, you fool.”

I shouted to him to stop. He did not heed me. I turned to follow. But the schooner heaved under my feet, and I clutched wildly at a stay.

The next instant the waters were churned into a foaming whirlpool, and a gray vision of rocks loomed over the starboard bow. There was a jarring crash, a grinding and rending of timbers; and with a final plunge the yacht staggered to her doom.

As I fell to the deck I caught a glimpse of two figures fighting in the cockpit. Then a giant comber broke over the bulwarks, and swept me, struggling, into the sea.

.

For an eon I rolled and tossed across a universe of darkness. Then something, tugging at my feet,

flung me up a long, smooth slope; and I lay quite still. A light flashed over my face during a brief period of consciousness. I heard the gruff tones of a man, and a girl's soft voice in answer. Then the light faded; and oblivion descended again.

CHAPTER III

THE MAN PIERRE

WHEN I woke, my first impression, strengthened, perhaps, by the sense of heaviness which clung about my body, was that I had gone to my rightful inheritance in the nether-world. But a tentative voyage of discovery with groping fingers revealed the concrete actuality of bedclothes; and I opened my eyes to the comfortable fact of human existence. I also became aware that I was not alone.

Seated on the edge of a chair, with the constrained manner of one who was not accustomed to such luxuries, a little, gnome-like figure of a man was regarding me with singular intentness. Indeed, so fixed was the stare of his pale blue eyes that for an instant I thought him a statue. But, as I moved in the bed, the bearded chin relaxed, and the wrinkled face, tanned to the color of old ivory, broke into a genial smile.

"Who are you?" I demanded faintly.

"Pierre."

"Pierre what?"

"Nozzing, M'sieu'. On'y Pierre."

"Where am I?"

“On ze Isle of Whispers.”

The words, pronounced in his musical accent, sounded in my ears with a familiar ring. I turned my head slowly and looked about me. The room was small and bare, the floor carpetless. A chair, the low iron bed on which I lay, a rude table standing beside the closed door opposite, formed the sole furnishings. Unplastered walls and a rafted roof circumscribed my line of vision.

Then, as perception widened, the more immediate accessories of my surroundings became apparent. My eyes caught the flood of morning sunshine pouring through the window. I sniffed the keen salt smell of the sea in the air about me. The drowsy murmur of rock-bound waters rose from somewhere below.

“What place is this?”

“A li’l hut—a—what you call eet—shanty.”

“I mean the island.”

“Oh! Ze Isle of Whispers.”

“And the schooner—my boat—ran ashore here?”

“Yes, M’sieu’.”

“When?”

“Las’ night.”

“Who else was saved?”

“On’y one——” He seemed to catch himself up sharply.

“Who was he?”

"You."

"But you said there was another."

"No, M'sieu'. I said zere was on'y one. Eet was you."

"You said there was only one *beside* me," I contradicted.

"I, M'sieu'?" His brow lifted in innocent wonder. "Oh, no! Eet is not possible. Or p'rhaps I haf misun'erstand you. I am not well acquaint' wiz your language, an' I make—what you call eet—mistakes."

I accepted his voluble explanation at its proper value. "You're sure you've made no mistake now?"

"Sure, M'sieu'; I could not. Zere were bodies, of course—two, t'ree bodies; but zey haf no life in 'em. I see myself."

My soul sickened at his words. "How were they dressed?"

"Like sailors all. An' one, he wear ze clot'es of off'cer."

"Poor Simpson!" I murmured.

The wrinkled face softened. "Ze captain, M'sieu'?"

"Yes."

"An' you?"

"I was the owner. The boat was my yacht."

There was a short silence. The man leaned back in his chair, and watched me with evident sympathy.

I closed my eyes and tried to piece together the events which had followed the wreck; but a hopeless chaos confronted me, and I turned again to him for further information.

"What did she strike—a rock?"

"Yes, M'sieu'." He pointed through the window. "You can see her out zere—all zere is lef' of her. Ze Darning Needel got her fas'."

"The Darning Needle?"

"Ze rock she ran on," he explained. "Eet stan' before a li'l harbor below here. She were comin' in safe when she hit."

"Do you mean we might have saved her, if we'd got her past the rock?"

"Yes, M'sieu'."

"Is it possible to escape it?"

"Eet would be hard to hit it, even for one who knew ze channel. You mus' haf had bad steersman, M'sieu'."

"We had," I muttered, with a silent imprecation at Blakeley. "I suppose you know the waters well."

"Ah, yes. I haf been in 'em a hundred—t'ousan' times."

"In a cat-boat?"

"No."

"In what?"

The little eyes narrowed into a half-frightened, half-secretive leer. "Ah! Zat is jus' eet."

His manner angered me. "Oh, come now! You can't make me believe there are no boats on the island."

He shrugged his shoulders. "Eet is a fac'."

"But you said you'd sailed in the waters——"

"*Been* in 'em," he corrected; "I swim, perhaps."

I laughed. "It's rather a long pull to the mainland."

"I go nevair to ze mainlan'."

"And you never got here either, I suppose."

He failed to see the sarcasm. "But yes, M'sieu'. I was wreck'."

"Alone?"

"Alone of my sheep. Zere were ozzers on ze island."

"What others?"

"Ma'mselle, an' her fazzer, an'—ze res'."

"How did *they* come here?"

"I do not know."

His jaw snapped shut; and I let the subject drop.

"Have you any objection to telling me about my rescue?" I asked presently.

"Zere is nozzing mooch to tell. Ma'mselle an' her fazzer were on ze cleefs when ze boat struck. Zey heard ze noise an' ran down into ze cove to see ze trouble. A wave rolled you to 'em. Zey called to me; an' we carry you up here." He raised his head in a sudden attitude of attention. "I t'ink she come now. Eet is time she bring your breakfas'."

He slipped from his chair, and turned towards the door. A shining bit of metal, protruding from his hip pocket, caught my eye.

"What have you there?"

"Where?"

I pointed. His hand shot around in a tardy attempt to conceal the object.

"Nozzings."

"It *looks* like a revolver."

"Eet—is."

"Let me see it."

"But, M'sieu'——"

"Let me see it," I commanded sternly.

He hesitated, then drew it forth reluctantly. It was the one which Blakeley had stolen from me.

"Where did you get this?" I asked, fingering it wonderingly.

"Get eet?"

"Yes. Where did it come from? How did you get it in your possession?"

"Oh, zat! I foun' eet, M'sieu'."

"Where?"

His eyes shifted furtively. "On one of ze dead bodies—zis mornin'."

"Hm!" I threw open the chambers. Two of the cartridges had been exploded. "You've been indulging in target practice, I see."

"Yes. But eet is vet. Eet not fire good."

The door creaked. A frenzy of fear seemed to

possess him. "Hide eet, M'sieu'—queek. She mus' not know I gave eet."

I thrust it beneath the bedclothes, as the girl appeared upon the sill. Pierre ran towards her with an exaggerated display of pleasure.

"He haf waked, Ma'mselle! He is himself again."

"So I see." She slipped a basket from her arm and placed it on the table. "I have evidently interrupted you."

"Not at all. I haf on'y tol' him of ze wreck, an' how he was rescue'."

"Only that, my good Pierre?" She laughed sarcastically. "You are very saving of words to-day."

He shot her an anxious glance. "Zere were ozzet t'ings he ask'——" His voice dropped to a whisper; and I lost the rest of the sentence.

She listened to him with a frowning brow, then motioned to the door.

"But, Ma'mselle," he protested.

"You may go," she said shortly. "You've done the best you could."

He paused at the threshold and looked back at me pleadingly. I answered with a reassuring smile; and he left the hut.

The girl came towards me. I regarded her with frank interest. Tall, straight-limbed, with a free, easy grace bred of the open air, there was a hint of

distinction in her pose strangely out of keeping with her surroundings. The low forehead, with its crown of dark hair, the delicate high-arched nose, and the firm oval chin beneath it, bespoke an ancestry of culture and refinement. In the steady brown eyes, now fixed on me with an unreserved look of inquiry, there lay the undaunted light of one who was more accustomed to command than to obey. Even the conventional blouse and short skirt seemed to have lost much of their commonplace appearance; and, as though to accentuate the effect, a massive gold chain of exquisite workmanship, hanging from her neck, was tucked away carelessly in the folds of her belt. As she paused by the bed I cast a quick glance at her face, and saw that she was frowning. When she spoke there was a suspicion of anger in her voice.

“What did that man give you just now?”

“Give me?”

“Yes. I saw you slip something under the bedclothes as I came in.”

I admitted the fact. “But it was mine anyway.”

She held out her hand. “May I have it?”

“No.”

“Why not?”

“It might come in handy, if I got into trouble.”

“Oh!” Her lip curled. “Do you feel so much in need of protection?”

I looked up at her keenly. "That sounds as though you knew what it was."

She bit her lip in vexation. "What if I do? It doesn't alter the case any." She hesitated, as a new thought struck her. "Did Pierre tell you where he got it?"

"He said he found it on one of the dead bodies from the wreck—a sailor, presumably."

"Ah! Did he describe him to you?"

"There was no need. You see, it was stolen from me on the schooner, so the natural inference would be that the thief was the man."

She moved nearer. "Stolen from you, did you say?"

"Yes; by a gentleman pirate named Blakeley. We shipped him yesterday morning. By the way"—I smiled at her facetiously—"perhaps he's a friend of yours."

She shook her head. "I've never heard his name before. Why should he be?"

"No reason whatever, except that he appeared extremely anxious to land here—so anxious, in fact, that he deliberately ran the boat on the rock."

"Oh!" Her brow clouded; and, for a moment, she stood in profound meditation. I seized the opportunity to slip the revolver under my pillow; but she seemed to have forgotten its existence. Arousing herself with a little shiver, she turned to the table. "I've brought your breakfast," she said

abruptly. "You must be hungry." And without apparent effort she dragged the heavy table over to the bed.

She opened the basket, and began to lay its contents before me. My wonder betrayed itself as she poured me out a foaming glass of milk.

"Oh, we have a cow," she answered my look of amazement.

"But the eggs——"

"And chickens, too. We're not deprived of all creature comforts."

"You couldn't live better on the mainland," I asserted, attacking the meal with the greed of a starving man.

She stood a little apart, studying me in gloomy silence. A strange quietude seemed to possess her, very different from the outspoken belligerency of her former mood.

"How many were there on the schooner?" she asked presently.

"Eight—seven men and one blackguard."

"Blakeley?"

"Yes."

"Are you sure he wrecked the boat on purpose? Mightn't it have been an accident?"

"Impossible."

Her lips tightened, and the heavy frown grew again between her brows. "Would you mind telling me how it happened?"

"Not at all." And I sketched the events of the past day to her, beginning with the fight in the galley, and ending with the final crash on the rock.

She listened more in anger and loathing, than with any sense of horror at what I told her, and, "It was awful!" she said when I had finished. But I was convinced that the exclamation referred to Blakeley's deed, and not to its results.

"Yes," I assented. "The one redeeming feature is that the man suffered with his victims."

"It would be less than he deserved," she declared with bitter emphasis; "much less."

She had turned, and was staring out through the window. I scrutinized her with puzzled eyes. Her sudden change of manner, the interest which she took in his doings, the evident disgust with which she viewed his acts, all led me to suspect that there had been some connection between her and Blakeley; but, tempted though I was to question her, there was that in her bearing which gave no promise of disclosure. Whatever secret she possessed must still remain a secret from me. I ate the last mouthfuls of my breakfast in thoughtful silence before I spoke again.

"Your *cuisine*, at any rate, has not suffered from your isolation," I said, pushing the plate from me.

"Oh! Pierre has been telling you?"

"Yes. He alleges that you have to swim whenever you go to the mainland."

She smiled faintly. "He's apt to exaggerate."

"So I thought. It's needless to say I didn't believe a word he said."

"Why not?" She set about clearing the table. "It would be the only way one could get there. But I never go."

"Never?" I repeated, my glance resting meaningfully on the gold necklace.

"Oh, this!" She drew down the heavy loops, and thrust them into her belt in startled haste.

"My father gave it to me."

"Undoubtedly. But it could hardly have been made here."

"Of course not. It—it was my mother's." Her voice hung on the last word with a constrained emphasis which puzzled me.

"Oh, an heirloom," I began; but a loud shout from outside cut suddenly into my utterance.

She raised her hand for silence, and listened intently, then ran over to the window and threw open the sash. A confused blur of voices swept up to us from the cove below. She whistled shrilly. One voice, rising above the rest, responded. She answered in pantomime, leaning over the sill and waving her hand in a vehement gesture of dismissal. An amused laugh, striking my ears with a vague sense of familiarity, greeted her effort; and, as a

last resort, she motioned over her shoulder towards me. The voices ceased; and she drew her head in with an air of relief.

“Who was that laughing?” I demanded.

“Only one of the men.”

“What men?”

“Father’s. They’ve been out examining the yacht.”

“Why were you so anxious to have them keep quiet?”

“They made so much noise. I was afraid they’d disturb you.” But she kept her face averted; and I suspected that she was not telling the truth.

I raised myself stiffly in the bed. “I’m going to get up.”

“Are you strong enough?”

“Perfectly.”

She slipped the basket over her arm. “I’ve had your clothes dried for you. They’re in the closet.”

“Thanks. I’ll be with you in a moment.”

“You will?” A transient fear shot again into her eyes. “Where?”

“Outside, of course.”

“Oh!” She smiled enigmatically as she turned away. “I’m afraid you may be disappointed.” And with a little nod she passed out across the threshold.

The door swung to behind her. Clambering to

the floor, I staggered weakly after her, and tried the knob. The door was locked.

I crept back to the bed, and flung myself upon it in disgusted anger. The next instant a low reverberating roar welled out upon the deep stillness; and I started up in fright.

CHAPTER IV

THE GIRL SYLVIA

THE hut trembled, as though shaken by a tempest, and I was forced to cling to the table to keep from being thrown out of bed. It was a full moment before I had regained my senses sufficiently to run to the window.

Perched on the edge of a precipice, which fell in one sheer drop to the sandy beach below, the hut overlooked a tiny land-locked harbor. Encircling it on either hand, twin lines of cliff reached out gaunt arms into the ocean; and in the fair middle of their embrace a jagged rock protruded through a tangled mass of wreckage—all that was left of the ill-fated *Naravido*. A heavy ball of smoke, drifting above it, bore silent witness to the explosion.

My eyes, turning shoreward, rested on a little group of men upon the beach beneath me. Four in all, they were busily unloading the cargoes of two rowboats—the gig and the cutter of the yacht—which had been drawn up on the sands. Clothing, nautical instruments, stores, even the brass cannon which had been the pride of my heart, were dumped helter-skelter into the bags awaiting them; and, as

each bag was filled, one of the men, shouldering it, staggered off up a precipitous path cut out of the living rock of the cliff.

Not content with blowing up the yacht, they were calmly despoiling me of my belongings. The cool insolence of the proceeding took my breath away; and when the last man, a grizzled giant who appeared to be the leader, began to stave in the row-boats with a ship's ax, I was thoroughly infuriated.

"Stop that!" I yelled down to him. "What do you mean by destroying my property?"

He paused long enough to look up at me, then went on without answering.

"I'll hold you responsible for this," I cried in a towering rage.

Except for a careless lifting of the shoulders, he paid not the slightest attention; I might have railed until I was hoarse without the least effect. Realizing my helpless position, I watched in impotent anger the final work of demolition; then, as he loaded the last sack on his back and followed the others, a new thought occurred to me, and, running to the closet, I got out my clothes. A cursory examination proved that the contents of the pockets, even to Blakeley's battered revolver, had not been touched.

I dressed with a painful slowness, made necessary by my bruised anatomy; then, dropping into the chair beside the bed, I probed my breast pockets for

the ingredients of a smoke. It was not until I had extracted a much-worn cigar case that I recalled certain former experiments with sea water and tobacco; and I removed the cover with some misgiving. Four Romeo and Juliet Perfectos, in the very pink of condition, confronted me where two sodden Porto Ricans should have been. The discovery of a brand-new box of matches completed the mystery; and as I drew in the first delicious whiff, I called down blessings on the problematical fairy who had made this gift.

But as the smoke wreaths thickened it was the no less problematical presence of the cigars which concerned me. Considering the fact that they could only be purchased in the best shops of the cities, their apparent profusion on this out-of-the-way isle was puzzling indeed. To be sure, the girl had boasted of creature comforts, and had proved their existence; but a cow and chickens might have been made the object of some special voyage; while tobacco such as this must have been freshly supplied.

I recalled Pierre's vehement disclaimer of any communication with the outer world, and the girl's later confirmation of it. Did she know of the cigars in my pocket? Or, being a girl, had she failed to realize the natural inference to which their appearance would give rise?

For the matter of that, why should either of

them wish me to believe that they and their people lived in isolated seclusion? If I were being held for ransom—and in view of my imprisonment this seemed the most probable—what object could be gained by making me think that my bankers were not within reach? Then again, how could all this be reconciled with the girl's evident curiosity about Blakeley, and her strange performance at the window? What possible bearing could it have upon the pilfering and blowing up of the yacht?

Six hours of wrestling with the enigma brought me no nearer to its solution; and when, at five o'clock, the girl arrived with my supper, I had come to the conclusion that my only chance of clearing it up lay in questioning her.

A certain listless apathy had crept into her manner since the morning; and her eyes were red and swollen as though from weeping. It was this which prompted me to begin with a tentative compliment, instead of the case in point.

"Whom am I to thank for the cigars?" I asked, holding up the half-burnt stump of the last one.

"That depends. They came from father's box; but——"

"But you were the means of their reaching me?"

"I'm afraid so."

"My appreciation is doubled. A girl who knows the essentials of masculine comfort is a treasure indeed."

She smiled indifferently. "I've learnt it all from father. He declares that tobacco is the staff of life."

"He knows. And he knows a good brand, too. Does he always smoke these?"

"As often as he can get them."

"And that is?"

"As often as he can be supplied."

"From the mainland?"

"Of course." My persistent questioning seemed to wake some recollection; she shot me a quick glance. "Fishermen anchor off here occasionally," she went on as though in explanation; "and father commissions them to buy him tobacco. When they come this way again they send it ashore."

"Oh! I didn't understand that you had constant visitors."

"We haven't. They come very seldom."

"But tobacco needs frequent replenishing—especially when there's an inveterate smoker about."

"It's possible that they may bring it to us in bulk." She motioned towards the table, where the preparations for my meal had been progressing. "Your supper is ready for you," she said with a hint of finality which warned me that further discussion would come to naught.

I drew up my chair with anticipatory relish. "You provide for me most generously, Miss—Miss Mystery, shall I call you?"

"You may, if you wish. But my real name is Sylvia Hayward, Mr. Renfrew."

I started. "How did you know mine?"

"From the things taken off the schooner. The clothing is all marked."

"Ah, yes." My brow darkened. "It seems to me your people have made rather free with my belongings."

She shrugged her shoulders. "They couldn't leave everything to go down with the yacht."

"No; but they might have left the yacht itself."

"Why? It was good for nothing but kindling wood."

"There may be two opinions as to that."

She laughed shortly. "You're getting very belligerent."

"Not at all. I'm simply standing up for my rights."

"Oh! Well, if you're so anxious, I'll see that your rights are protected. When the allotment comes you'll get your share."

"My share? But I'm entitled to it all."

"Not here. It belongs to the community until it's divided. Then each person gets his portion."

I looked up at her sharply. "That sounds like socialism."

"It is," she returned earnestly; "or father's version of it. He became a convert years ago."

"Hm! I'm not very familiar with its doctrines. But don't you think it's stretching them pretty far when it comes to taking an outsider's property?"

"You're not an outsider. As long as you remain here you're a member of the community, and must contribute to its support."

I ate a few mouthfuls in silence. This new phase of the situation might account for some of the mysteries which surrounded me. It might also have a strong bearing on my fate.

"How many are there in the community?" I asked presently.

"Six men, including father, and three women—that is," she corrected hastily, "two other women—old servants of the family—beside myself."

"That makes nine in all. And I suppose each one will want a substantial share of the ransom."

"What ransom?"

"The one you're holding me for."

Her brow cleared for the first time, and she broke into a hearty laugh. "What an idea! We're not holding you for any ransom."

"Indeed!" I smiled back at her. "I thought I was one of the assets of the community, to be owned in common until I could be converted into cash."

"Now you're making fun of me."

"Not a bit of it. What else could I think with a locked door staring me in the face."

"Oh, that!" Her countenance sobered. "That was done for another reason."

"What reason?"

"As a protection to yourself."

"Am I such an infant that you can't trust me to play about the island without fear of my drowning or falling off the cliff?"

"You don't understand me," she said seriously. "And I—I can't explain."

Again the conversation had come to a deadlock; and again I had learned only enough to whet my curiosity for more. Her reticence about present events led me to turn to the past as a last resource.

"Have you lived here long?"


"Ever since my mother——" She stopped suddenly. "For eighteen years."

"What made your father settle in such an out-of-the-way place?"

"His love for the sea, I suppose. And then there were troubles—difficulties——"

"Financial?" I suggested, thinking of my own bankrupt state.

"Yes—partly." She hesitated, as though considering the advisability of making me a confidant, then faced me squarely. "In the old days he was the president of a bank in Cleveland—one of the biggest and most conservative there. Something happened—I don't know what—but the bank was forced to stop payment; and when they came to examine the



books they found a shortage in the funds. Father was accused of—of mismanagement. They even began criminal proceedings against him. But they could produce no evidence, and he was eventually cleared.”

“He must have felt the disgrace keenly.”

“He did. They say he shunned all his old friends and associates—wouldn’t even speak to them when he met them on the street. Then other troubles occurred—family troubles; and the last ties which bound him to Cleveland seemed broken forever. He got together what money he could, sold out house and furniture, and we moved East. For a while we lived in Boston—it was there, I think, that he first became interested in socialism. Then he heard of this island, and purchased it from the government. It has been our home ever since.”

She paused, and fixed her eyes on me with peculiar intensity. It suddenly struck me that she might have been telling her story for some hidden purpose, and that she was trying to fathom my belief in what she had said. Her silence about her mother, and her allusion to family troubles, were perhaps the kernels of the mystery; but I was in no position to prove it. I took my cue from her last words.

“You must have been very young,” I said quietly.

Her gaze shifted. “I was only a baby.”

"And have you never left the island since?"

"Oh, yes. I spent four years in a boarding school in Boston."

"You did?" The statement surprised me. "Then you've seen something of the world."

"All I want to. They were the four most miserable years of my life. Are you through?" This as I dropped my knife and fork on the empty plate and pushed it from me.

"Quite."

She began to gather up the dishes. I rose to help her; and as we worked, my mind ran back to a former theme of the conversation.

"How did your father come to form this community?" I asked.

"I don't know. It was as much the growth of circumstance as anything else."

"Then he didn't bring any of his converts out with him?"

"No. They all came later."

"In what way?"

"Well, two were Gloucester fishermen who had run amuck with their skipper, and escaped to the island in a dory. One was a man from New Bedford, whom father picked up on the beach, half-drowned. There's some story about his fleeing from the authorities, but I've never heard it substantiated. Then, of course, there's Pierre. He was rescued from a French bark which was wrecked

here, and stayed on simply because he had no other place to go."

"And the last one?"

"What last one?"

"You told me there were six, but you've only accounted for five."

"Oh, my cousin, Dick Hayward! But you'd hardly class him with the others. He got into trouble out West, after he had left college; and father took him in out of the kindness of his heart."

I watched her closely; but she displayed no sign of her former emotion. I was almost inclined to think that I had been following the wrong scent. She lifted the heavy basket from the table.

"May I carry it for you?"

"Yes—to the door."

"You're not going to lock me up again?"

"I'm afraid I shall have to."

"Even though I give you my solemn promise not to leave the hut, and"—I remembered the weapon hidden under the pillow—"and return you the revolver?"

"Whether you left the hut or not would be of no consequence. And I want you to keep the revolver—for your own protection."

"You laughed when I suggested that this morning."

"I know; but—things have changed since then. You're in danger—very real danger."

"Of what?"

She looked about her furtively, then beckoned to me. I bent towards her.

"Of murder," she whispered.

"Murder!" I ejaculated.

But she had slipped across the threshold and was gone.

I stared at the closed door in speechless amazement. The next instant it swung open again; and she flew to my side.

"The key!" she exclaimed. "I left it in the keyhole—on the outside. It has disappeared."

CHAPTER V

AN OPEN GRAVE

HER white face was a sufficient warrant of her sincerity. I began to feel a trifle uneasy myself.

"Perhaps it has fallen to the ground," I suggested weakly. "Have you looked?"

"Yes. It's not there."

"Is it the only one you have?"

She nodded. I dropped to my knees and examined the inner fastenings of the door.

"There's a staple here, and a hole sunk into the woodwork opposite," I said hopefully. "Suppose I should lock myself in?"

Her face brightened. "I hadn't thought of that. But we must find something for a bolt."

"It's found," I answered, whipping out Blakeley's revolver, and running its barrel through the catches. "This will do splendidly."

"But if you should need it——"

"It's broken," I explained. "My pirate friend left it in exchange for mine."

"Oh!" She held out her hand. "May I see it?"

"Certainly."

I drew it from the staple and gave it to her. She looked at it carefully, turning it over in her fingers, as though searching for some mark of identification.

"Yes; it will do," she agreed, returning it with a faint smile of indifference.

I held the door open for her. She paused on the threshold.

"I have your solemn promise not to leave the hut," she reminded me.

"I shall hold to it—unless the place gets too hot."

"That's understood, of course. Good luck to you."

"Good-night."

I caught a glimpse of a tiny path straggling across a miniature moorland, with a low rambling house in the middle distance, and beyond it a jagged frieze of rock rising black against the purple sky. Then I remembered the girl's injunction; and, closing the door, I shot home my improvised bolt. The sound of her retreating footsteps trailed off into silence.

I gave the door a last pull to make certain that it was secure, then got out my revolver from under the pillow. 'As I drew out the cartridges, one by one, the truth of Pierre's words flashed upon me. "Eet is vet. Eet not fire good," he had said; and the greasy dampness which clung to the chambers and barrel bore out his assertion. A mere hint to the girl would have procured me all the ammunition

I wanted ; and I had neglected to ask her. I cursed myself for a fool.

With a bit of cloth I managed to clean up the revolver ; but the water-soaked cartridges defied my efforts to dry them. Despairing in the attempt, I thrust them back into their places, and dropping the useless weapon into my pocket, leaned moodily across the window ledge.

The sun, a crimson ball, hung low over the western reach of cliffs which inclosed the little harbor. The level flood of light, feeling its way amongst the somber gorse and bracken, wove lace-like threads of gold across a woof of violet. Great stains of claret streaked the opalescent depths of the further sea ; and above, molded against the clear blue of the sky, the white clouds were shot with saffron and scarlet. The eastern headland still glowed in the full riot of the sunset colors ; but the waters and the sandy beach below me were already shrouded in gloom.

The peacefulness of the scene was in sharp contrast to the perplexing turmoil of mystery and danger which surrounded me ; and half consciously my mind ran back along the chain of circumstances which had brought me to my present plight. I wondered whether Prescott had been able to save the firm from bankruptcy, and what he would think of my strange disappearance. I wondered whether the yacht would be reported as among those missing, and whether he would see it in the papers—I won-

dered whether I should ever see him again. Simpson, Carton, Larabee—even Blakeley himself, it appeared—I alone was needed to make the tale of the dead complete. Was this projected attack upon me to be in the nature of a final sacrifice?

I thought of Sylvia Hayward, with her evident refinement and breeding; I thought of that burly giant, her father, and the nest of incipient anarchists whom he harbored; and I was at a loss to know how she had escaped the contaminating influence of a community where sudden death and murder seemed to be the principal creed.

There was an elusive charm about the girl, which, even on that first day of our acquaintance, stirred a new emotion within me. Perhaps it was the romance and mystery of her surroundings which gave poignancy to the feeling; or perhaps—and this is the more likely—it was my own complete ignorance of her sex. I knew nothing of women, except those who fell within two great classes: the gratuitously critical relative, and the casual fashion-plate, beside whom one sat at dinners and hashed over the latest social inanities. But this girl was different. There was a breezy freshness about her—an unconscious grace of manner, as free and untrammelled in its growth as the flowering gorse of her island. I tried to imagine how she would appear in a ballroom. I wondered what some of my friends in New York would think of her. And, as I wondered, the sun-

light faded, and the gray swoop of the twilight fell upon sea and land.

I was about to turn from the window when my eye caught a dim figure moving swiftly down the darkling ribbon of sand below. The peculiar ambling gait and dwarflike proportions suggested Pierre; but the elaborate caution which appeared to govern his movements, and the constant furtive glances which he cast over his shoulder, were new in my acquaintance of him. It was not until he had paused beneath the hut, and had thrown back his gnarled old face, that his identity was made sure.

I waved him a welcome. A warning finger stole to his lips; and he motioned me vehemently to stand aside. I stepped back a pace, mystified; and the next instant something struck against the outer boarding of the hut with a sharp crack. My first thought was that the attack had begun, and they were firing at me. I waited a second, listening for the echo of the report; then, as the silence continued, I crept back warily to the window. A heavy missile, rising out of the darkness, crashed over the sill and fell clattering at my feet.

I picked it up gingerly. It proved to be a large stone, tied up in a dingy scrap of paper. As I broke the string the paper came away in my hand, and I discovered a penciled scrawl upon its inner side.

"It is known that your door is fastened," it read;

"barricade your window." The appended initials were "S. H."

I leaned out of the window. Pierre was already moving away. I signaled that I had received the message; then, as he turned on his backward track, I remembered the wet cartridges in the revolver, and whistled softly. He did not appear to hear me. I whistled louder. He made a vague gesture towards the cliffhead at my left, and hurried on. I was about to shout to him when a low chuckling laugh sounded from the outer angle of the hut, and I understood the reason for his action: we were being spied upon. I reached the door in time to hear the marauder's departing footsteps die away upon the hard turf.

For a moment I debated the advisability of following him. But the unknown dangers which I should have to face were in striking contrast to the comparative safety of the hut; and I ended by returning to the window. Pierre, gaining the upper end of the beach, had turned into the rocky path, and was now but a dim shadow moving against the deeper shadows of the cliffside. I watched him toil up the steep ascent, saw him pause upon the crest, caught a final glimpse of his black silhouette as he strode out of sight across the somber skyline; and my last chance of assistance seemed to go with him. Surrounded by desolation, I might yell myself hoarse without any one hearing me—might be killed and

buried, and no one be the wiser. Perhaps even now my murderer was skulking near-by, waiting for complete darkness before commencing his attack. The haunting echo of those mysterious footsteps rang with increasing menace in my brain.

But presently my better nature asserted itself; and, shaking off the puerile terror, I made a careful round of the hut, probing the walls for any secret opening, feeling along the floors for hidden traps, testing the efficiency of my extemporaneous fastening on the door. The place appeared to be as secure as human hands could make it. But as I picked my way back in the obscurity—for Miss Hayward, in spite of her kindly foresight, had failed to provide me with a candle—the words of her message flashed upon me. I groped for the heavy table, and, dragging it over to the window, set it on edge, preparatory to blocking up the gap.

The evening had fallen, blurring the contours of cliff and rock with its opaque shadows, filling the rounded basin of the cove with a darkness which seemed almost tangible. Far out over the velvet blackness of the sea, a few shreds of cloud still bore the fading purple of the sunset; but the horizon line beneath them was shrouded in a cold gloom. In the distant offing the green light of an unseen vessel swung lazily. A multitude of stars pricked their dim radiance through a hazy sky.

I watched until the night had blotted out the land-

scape. Then, pulling down the window, I drew the table into its place, and threw myself, fully dressed, on the bed to sleep.

I woke with the faint echo of a noise ringing in my ears, and started upright. For an instant the chill midnight, with its phantoms of darkness, confronted me; then, out of the deathlike silence, the noise was repeated—a dull scrape of some one—something—upon the roof above. The spasmodic movement suggested a bird seeking a perch on the shingles; but, as my hearing sharpened, the muffled sounds of a cough floated down to me. And of a sudden the blood froze in my veins.

To be attacked in broad daylight is bad enough; but to be conscious of murder stealing unseen out of the night is horror incarnate. Numb with terror, I fixed my eyes automatically upon the black void above me, and followed the eerie rasping on its downward course towards the eaves. Time appeared to be of no consequence; stealth alone was important. Hours seemed to elapse before the noises finally ceased on the outer edge of the roof.

A silver thread of moonlight marked the crack between the table and the lintel of the window; and, as I watched, a heavy shadow, passing swiftly across it, disappeared below. There was the soft tap of feet upon the sill. The window was raised noiselessly. Something rubbed gently against the

rough surface of the table; and in the momentary pause which followed, a muttered curse rose on the air.

All this I noted with the stupor of fright still on me. But at the oath I woke to a shivering sense of peril; and, slipping from the bed, I crouched down behind the chair. A hand appeared around the edge of the table. The heavy obstruction was thrust back cautiously. A widening ray of light crept slowly across the floor to my feet. I receded from it, inch by inch, until the bed stopped my retreat; then, seized with a fear of discovery, I dived under it, crawling out on the other side.

Only a second had passed; but it was sufficient for the man to gain an entrance. As I rose to my knees the illuminated oblong of the window was clear. The thin ribbon of moonlight, striking across the lower corner of the bedclothes, left the upper part of the bed, and the surrounding room, in utter darkness. I strained my eyes vainly into the thick shadows; then, dropping on my hands, I laid my ear against the floor.

The rough boarding gave forth the faintest vibration—the mere quiver of a footfall. I raised my head. The silence was absolute. I bent down to the floor again; and the stealthy movement seemed to have grown louder. It was approaching the bed.

I cowered back against the wall, trembling. There was the fraction of a pause; and then a dim figure

rose ghostlike beside the chair which I had quitted. I saw a raised arm, a flash of metal in the moonlight; and the bed groaned beneath the heavy impact of the blow.

Tingling with horror, I slipped from my hiding-place, and stole a few yards toward the doorway. In the momentary confusion the movement was unnoticed; but, as silence descended again, my foot scraped against the flooring; and the other's low grunt of comprehension warned me that my presence was known. I crept on a little further, and waited. Once more the stealthy footsteps quivered in the air.

But now the panic of fear had left me; and, as the man advanced, I realized that the strategic position was mine. Drawing the revolver from my pocket, I pressed back the hammer with an ostentatious click. As I had expected, the footfalls halted. I stole noiselessly from my place, still holding to the protection of the wall.

For a long moment the stillness of death possessed us. It seemed as though neither of us dared even to breathe. Then with infinite pains he recommenced his onward journey; and, matching him, I continued my cautious progress towards the door. I timed my movements with his, so that the faint sounds of the one would cover those of the other; and, as I gained the threshold, I had the satisfaction of hearing him pause near the spot which I had

indicated by the click of the revolver. I rose quietly to my feet, and waited, with my hand clutched about the fastening of the door.

It was long in coming—that cruel knife thrust which was meant for me, but which bit instead into the soft wood of the flooring. And with the thud Blakeley's pistol shot from its catches; the door flew open; and I fled for my life into the moonlit reaches of the night.

Concealment was imperative; and, after running a few rods down the exposed trail, I struck across the moorland towards a little declivity which gave a shadowed promise of foliage in its depths. As I descended, a thin film of mist, floating over it, enveloped me completely—so completely, in fact, that I had stumbled into a clump of bushes before I knew it. And none too soon; for, as I dropped to the ground, a sharp patter of feet rang out along the path I had left.

I listened to it until it halted at some point near the main buildings. Then, scrambling through the underbrush, I scudded off in the opposite direction. The moon, shaded by a passing cloud, had veiled my route in sudden obscurity; and for an indeterminate time I struggled on blindly over the rough turf.

I had topped a little hill, and, hearing the soft murmur of the sea before me, was speeding down a gentle slope towards it, when a low mound of earth seemed to rise at my very feet. I swerved

aside, in a wild effort to avoid it; but my heel slipped and my legs flew from under me. I plunged headlong into a shallow trench.

Though dazed by the fall, I was conscious of a vague something dimly outlined in the earth beneath me. I reached out a cautious hand; and at its touch the thin layer of mold broke away. The clammy chill of damp hair brushed my fingers. I started back with a shriek of terror. And in the growing moonlight Simpson's dead face started up at me—Simpson's dead face, with the telltale bullet wound an ugly smudge on the placid brow.

For a space I stared back at it in stupefied horror. Then a shadow fell across it; and I looked up. Blakeley was smiling down at me triumphantly over the edge of the grave.

CHAPTER VI

A CRY IN THE NIGHT

IN that place of death, with the pallid moonlight weaving its ghostly shadows about him, the man's sudden appearance seemed to be that of an apparition. I cowered back against the side of the grave in an agony of fear. He appeared to realize my terror, and to glory in it; for, though his eyes followed me with a malignant gleam, not a muscle of his body quivered. The ghastly grin on his face remained unrelaxed.

I stared at him until my eyes ached; then, with an awakening shudder, I drew myself upright. And at the movement he spoke.

"You're a little ahead of time."

I made no answer.

"Hunting for company, I suppose."

The slight downward jerk of the head referred to the horror beneath me. I started perceptibly. He laughed.

"Don't like the idea much, do you? Well, you'll soon get used to it." He waved his hand towards three low mounds rising in the near distance. "They did—over there. And just look at the cap-

tain; as quiet as a mouse—unless you've disturbed him." He bent over Simpson's uncovered face. "And, by Jove, I believe you have! Well, I should have finished the job before I paid you that little call."

I could stand his cruel bantering no longer. "I thought—they told me you were dead, too," I said huskily.

"Yes. It was Sylvia's idea. She imagined it would be safer. You see, you blabbed too much about what happened."

"I gave nothing but facts."

"It's the facts I complain of—particularly your version of them."

"It was correct, as far as I knew. I supplied no motives."

"Because you couldn't?" he sneered.

"Yes. The incentive to such an act is beyond my scope."

The malicious grin returned. "If you were stranded ashore, wouldn't you want to get back to your dear family?"

"Perhaps; but at least I'd choose some lawful way."

"I chose the way that came handiest—especially after our first little tiff in the cock-pit. My temper's none of the best when I'm crossed."

"Miss Hayward rather suggested it this morning."

"Sylvia? What does she know about it?"

"A good deal, I should judge, from what she said."

He threw me a wrathful glance. "You two appear to have grown quite chummy."

"She has been very kind."

"Oh, indeed! Well, her kindness be damned!"

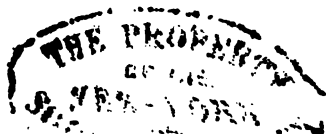
His voice rang with an ugly note; and, as I watched his face, a sharp spasm of jealousy swept over it. His sudden gust of temper brought a wild idea of escape to my mind. Sinking back into the shadow, I dropped my hand carelessly into the pocket which concealed my revolver; and when I spoke there was pointed insolence in my tone.

"The fault's all yours," I taunted him coolly. "You made the greatest mistake of your life when you let me go."

"Oh, you think so, do you?" He lifted his right arm with an angry growl; and I saw the knife gleam in his hand.

I met his glance squarely. "It's too late for anything like that. And, besides, you haven't got the nerve, you dirty, low hound."

His face went white at the insult. With a bellow of rage he rushed at me along the edge of the grave. But I was waiting for the movement—that unguarded movement which was my salvation; and, as he came within striking distance, I thrust



the revolver upwards, into his face. He jerked back suddenly.

"Hands up," I commanded. "We'll see how *you* like the game."

He obeyed me grudgingly. "It isn't loaded, any way——"

"*Wasn't* loaded. But Miss Hayward happened to remember it. You were present, I believe, when she sent me her little gift through Pierre."

Something like a curse escaped from him; but, to my relief, he accepted the lie without suspicion. He scowled down at me. "What are you going to do?"

The question was more pertinent than even he imagined. Although I had the upper hand, it was he who held the only dangerous weapon.

"Find out what you've got against me," I parleyed; "and why you're hunting me down like this."

"You know too much, for one thing."

"Is that all?"

"No; there's Sylvia."

"Would it aid your cause to add another murder to your list?"

"Perhaps not—if she knew it was murder. But a suicide, now, or a fall over the cliffs——"

"With a knife wound in me?"

"The knife wound could easily be marred by a convenient rock."

I pondered for a moment. "If I let you go will you promise not to attack me?"

"No."

"Perhaps you don't realize that your life is in my hands."

"I don't," he asserted. "And, if it were, you wouldn't dare to take it."

"Why?"

"You gave the reason when you hinted that I wouldn't take yours."

He was trying my own ruse; but I refused to get angry. "I'm no murderer," I admitted; "but in a fair fight——"

"Fair fight?" he sneered; "when you've got me covered?"

"Oh! Is that it? Well, drop your knife, and I'll drop my gun."

It was a bold move; but I was growing desperate. With my cramped limbs aching in every joint, I would have welcomed a hand-to-hand tussle with delight. He saw the anxiety in my face and smiled sarcastically.

"I'll agree," he said, "if you'll drop your gun first."

"Hardly."

"Very well."

His raised hand fell slightly behind his shoulder.

"And none of that, either," I cried. "I'm afraid you'll *have* to drop that knife now."

"And if I don't?"

"You take the consequences."

"All right," he laughed. "Fire away."

I started forward. A gleam of silver darted from his hand; and the broad knife buried itself in the earth at my back. As I dodged to one side, my finger involuntarily pressed the trigger. A look of surprise overspread his face. He had heard the empty click.

"So it wasn't loaded, after all," he exclaimed.

"You damned liar, I've called your bluff."


He made as though he would spring at me. I reached over swiftly, and dragged the heavy blade out by the hilt.

"You'd better keep your distance," I advised him.

"Don't forget I've got the knife."

His eyes narrowed with baffled anger; but he took my suggestion, and halted on the brink of the grave. I shifted to an easier position; and, for a long moment, we confronted each other, our glances clashing in their guarded watch. Except for the low rustle of the wind in the grasses, and the steady beat of the waves on the cliffs behind me, the silence was absolute. We both might have been carved in stone.

And then, from the distant seas, there came a strange interruption—the long drawn wail of a siren, followed by a blinding light. The sudden flare, pouring into the darkness, brought me upright



with a shiver. I caught a glimpse of the man's clear-cut outline looming before me—of the shadow of my head, a black splotch across his trousers; and then, as my gaze wavered, he was upon me, a leaden weight, bearing me, struggling, down into the grave.

I had dropped the revolver at the first onslaught; but, through some instinct, I still clung tightly to the knife. As he forced me backward, I made a vicious jab at him. But the space was too constricted: the blow fell short; and I had barely time to draw away my arm before he crashed heavily on my chest. I could feel his fingers close about my throat.

There was a gasping moment, when the breath seemed to be squeezed from my body. Then the icy touch of the Thing beneath me pierced to my marrow; and the horror of it gave me strength. With a superhuman effort I wrenched my free arm clear, and drove it full into the man's face. A grunt of pain escaped him. I repeated the blow, now with my open palm; and, as his head shot back, the clutch on my neck relaxed. The instant's respite was all that I needed. Wriggling from under him, I pressed him back fiercely against the side of the grave. He fought like a wildcat, pounding at my face and breast with his clenched fists. But now I had my weight to aid me; and, countering his every movement, I gradually forced him down into the place where I had lain.


For a second longer the struggle lasted. Then his strength seemed suddenly to desert him; and, as I rolled him under me, his head fell back with a heavy thud. I raised the knife in my hand, and struck home.

The blow, aimed at his breast, turned in its downward course; and the blade sank into the fleshy tissues of his shoulder. He twitched once, then lay motionless.

I crept away from him, and staggering to my feet, scrambled up the crumbling wall of earth. The strange flare from the sea had vanished; and the moon, swinging clear of its bank of clouds, once more flooded the darkness with its mellow light. I listened for a moment, to assure myself that the man below me was still living, then, turning, climbed up the slope down which I had come.

I paused on the crest of the rise to take my bearings. Before me, and to the right and left, the island lay spread out like a vast map. In its general contour it resembled the dead crater of a volcano, the outer fringe of the cliffs forming its lips, the hollow, where I had first taken refuge, its deepest point. Indeed, roughly speaking, it was one great bowl of verdure, uplifted in the iron clasp of the rocks.

Clinging to its frail perch with obstinate tenacity, my little hut shone in bleak relief against the somber



skyline; and, further along, tucked cozily away beneath the higher ledges which marked the southerly end of the island, the home of the Haywards, with its low, rambling outbuildings, seemed to melt into the pale green glow of the night. As far as I could see, these were the only habitations. From the western, or shoreward, side, to the gaunt seaward ridges, there was no other sign of life.

My most obvious way of return lay across the little valley; but from motives of safety, I chose the more circuitous route along the eastern rim. Shrouded in shadow, it gave promise of convenient hiding-places in its nooks and crannies; and, moreover, it would bring me around to my abode in a direction opposite to that by which I had set forth. But it also had its drawbacks, as I soon learned to my discomfort; for the ground became rough and uneven, with ruts and hollows running at unexpected angles; and the loose shale slipped continuously under my feet.

I kept as close to the outer edge as the indented coastline would allow me, pausing now and then to look anxiously over my shoulder, or to cast a casual glance across the silver-crested seas. But it was not until I had gained the southernmost corner of the island that anything occurred to arouse my suspicions; and then what I saw was of so uncanny a nature that I could scarcely credit my eyes.

I had crouched in a rocky cleft, and was taking a last peep to seaward, when a long narrow boat, heading straight for the cliffs beneath me, shot silently across the moonlit path of the waters at my feet. It was gone, even as I watched it. I gasped in horrified attention. Then, as no sound of the crash floated up to me, I crept out on a ragged ledge and peered over. There was nothing below.

A fear of the unreal possessed me; and, drawing back with a shiver, I stole hastily away from the spot. My one thought was to put as much ground behind me as possible—to get back to the shelter of the hut. But now a new obstacle confronted me. As I forsook my old route around the buildings, and struck inland, I became conscious of a strange murmur welling out of a loose cluster of bowlders a yard or so down the path. At first I took it for the moaning of the wind, which was now sweeping freshly over the pasture; then a curious strain of meaning seemed to grow into it; and, suddenly, I realized that it was made by voices—human voices, but so blurred by distance, and an eerie quiver of undertones, as to have no human depth. Coming upon the heels of my late adventure, the ghostly echoes sapped my last ounce of courage. I turned, and fled blindly towards the hut.

And, as I ran, from the sleeping house behind me there rose a wild shriek of agony, of fear un-

utterable. It seemed as though the very demons of hell were giving tongue. I sped up the final stretch, half crazed with terror; and, staggering across the threshold, barred the door against the haunted night.

CHAPTER VII

WHICH TREATS OF A PUZZLING INTERVIEW—

It was late the next morning when Pierre's cheery call awoke me. I tumbled out of bed with an uneasy sense of the night's events still upon me, and, shooting back my pistol-bolt, let him in. He smiled amicably over the large breakfast basket.

"M'sieu' haf slep' well?"

"Tolerably. Have I kept you waiting?"

"Eet is the two—t'ree time I haf come. But M'sieu' give no soun'."

"I was very tired."

He spread out his hands expressively. "*Sans doute*," he agreed quietly; but there was a twinkling hint of understanding in his eyes.

It would have been strange, indeed, if he had not known something of my midnight adventure; and I contented myself with the thought that his manner could augur nothing but good. But, as I ate my breakfast, his obstinate silence began to annoy me. His friendly glance seemed to take on a malignant gleam; the genial smile appeared to grow into the ugly distortion of a grin. What if I had

struck harder than I had intended? What if Blakeley—or, to give him his proper name, Dick Hayward—had been dead when found? Justice, as it was understood here, could hardly be auspicious to an outsider. With Pierre's watchful gaze upon me I already felt the nervous dread of the condemned.

"Are they all well—down at the house?" I asked huskily.

"But yes, M'sieu'." He favored me with a look of surprise.

"*All* well?" I repeated, "even Mr. Hayward?"

"Ze ol' man?"

"No, the young one."

"In ver' good condition, M'sieu'—ver' fine."

"He's about, I suppose?"

Pierre shook his head grudgingly. "Not jus' about—but, if M'sieu' wish to see him——"

"Later on, perhaps. Is he in bed?"

"Oh, ye-es, M'sieu'." He drew out his words with an exaggerated pout of indifference. "But eet is nozzings—for one, two days, maybe, an' zen all right again. I assure you, eet is nozzing."

His anxious desire to make light of the matter was as amazing as it was comforting. I drew a sigh of relief.

"Has he been taken sick?"

"No. You see, he did go out walking las' night; an' in ze dark he fall, an'—an'——"

"Cut himself?" I hazarded.

"Cut himself—zat's eet—agains' a stone—a ver' sharp stone, maybe——" He glanced up at me cunningly, as he indicated his left shoulder. "Oh, ze smalles' cut—right here."

Was it a lie? Or simply the result of ignorance? A lie, I decided. But what new move in the game was it intended to conceal?

"I'm glad it's no worse," I said lamely.

"Yes, M'sieu'. An' he haf no bad feelings about eet. He is ver' glad eet happened."

"Why?"

"Because eet show him how foolish he was."

"Foolish?"

"Yes, M'sieu'—to go out walking in ze dark."

The man was becoming ridiculous. "I'm afraid some of the women of his family will hardly agree with you."

"But yes, M'sieu', zey do—all of zem." And again, with enforced emphasis: "All of zem, M'sieu'."

"Then who was that woman screaming early this morning?"

The geniality in his face faded into a look of startled surprise. "Zere was no woman screaming," he declared in hasty denial. "Nobody screamed. M'sieu' mus' haf had a bad dream."

"Not at all. I was very wide awake when I heard it."

“I cannot help zat. Zere was nozzing to hear—nozzing—an’ I know.”

Again he was lying; and again I wondered for what purpose. “How could you know,” I demanded sharply, “unless you were up all night?”

“I was, M’sieu’—zat is,” he explained hastily, “I was res’less—not sleepy.”

“In bed?”

“Of course.”

A hint of anger in his voice warned me to question him no further. I finished my meal in studied silence; and he, as silently, cleared away the things. As he lifted the basket he turned to me sullenly.

“You are to come wiz me.”

My heart leaped into my throat, though, after all, I had been expecting some such summons.

“Where?” I stammered.

“To ze big house. M’sieu’ Hayward—ze ol’ man—wants you to come.”

“Good,” I returned with affected cordiality. “I shall be delighted to make his acquaintance.” But, as I followed Pierre across the threshold, I took occasion to thrust Dick’s long knife into my belt.

It was a day conceived and born in an overweening mood of sadness. A cold, cheerless light, filtering through the sodden clouds, struck out the faintest of shadows, without shape or contour, without depth or distance. Sea and land were fairly washed in gray.

The sluggish wind, moaning over the cliffs, gave mournful voice to this impalpable sorrow; and, as it swept my face, I shivered as at the touch of death. But Pierre, with his mercurial temperament, seemed to shake off his momentary sulkiness; and a few yards down the path he turned to me with his old infectious smile.

“M’sieu’ haf nozzing to fear,” he said assuringly, “if he do what M’sieu’ Hayward tell him.”

“And that is?”

“Ah, eet is not for me to say.”

I was not to be comforted by any such vague statement. “But after what happened last night——”

“Nozzing happened las’ night,” he reiterated, flashing me a quick glance of meaning. “I haf tol’ M’sieu’ already—many times—zere was nozzing. He will do well not to forget.”

It was evident that, for some hidden reason, my attack upon Dick was to be forgiven. “I have no wish to remember it,” I assented, “if young Mr. Hayward will do the same.”

“Oh, Deeck, he make no trouble. An’, beside’, he in bed—seeck.”

He wagged his head with an air of finality; and, as we were nearing our destination, I let the subject drop. The house, seen from close quarters, was larger, more pretentious, than I had at first thought it. A two-story wooden structure, its breadth of

six windows lent it an imposing solidity; while the deep shaded veranda across the front, with its impedimenta of easy-chairs and hammocks, gave it a sense of luxury strangely out of keeping upon this lonely isle. Indeed, under no circumstances could I conceive it to be the home of a ruined man.

As we approached the steps, Sylvia's face appeared in one of the upper windows. I nodded pleasantly; but, to my amazement, she turned away without the slightest sign of recognition. Here was one, at least, to whom my actions were not pleasing. I tried to persuade myself that her opinion of me was of no consequence; but the attempt was by no means successful. I followed Pierre across the porch in a curiously cynical state of mind.

The room which we entered, opening directly upon the veranda, ran back in a broad oblong through the center of the house; and again I was struck by the marked sense of its comfort and ease. Lounging chairs, and richly carved tables with their homely array of ornaments, dotted the floor in profusion; well-filled bookshelves lined the lower walls; and above them I could dimly make out one or two marine paintings of no mean workmanship. I turned to Pierre with an exclamation of wonder.

"Zis is ze living-room," he explained, "where we all may come. In zere"—he pointed to the left

—"ze Haywards live. 'An' here, on ze ozzer side, are ze men's quarters."

"And in the rear?"

"Ze dining-room and kitchen." He set his basket down. "If M'sieu' will wait, I go call M'sieu' Hayward."

I nodded; and he disappeared through one of the doors on the left. I turned to the nearest table, and looked idly over an old pile of magazines. The one at the bottom seemed newer than the rest; and I drew it out to examine it more closely. It was the latest issue.

I threw it down with a smile of amusement. Sylvia's ubiquitous fisherman must have paid them a recent visit—or perhaps it had been taken from the yacht. I was reaching over to pick it up again when a door creaked open, and I swung around half-guiltily. The burly giant, whom I had seen on the beach, came forward to meet me with extended hand.

"Welcome to my home, Mr. Renfrew," he said heartily. "You must excuse my belated hospitality; but, to tell the truth, I hardly knew what to do with you when you came ashore."

"No excuse is necessary," I returned. "The unexpected guest should always take pot-luck."

He laughed. "You put it nicely. I hope Sylvia has looked after your comfort."

"In every respect. I feel quite at home."

“Good. I would ask you down here, but, you see——”

“I’d rather stay up at the hut, if you don’t mind,” I broke in hastily; and, indeed, with the thought of the murderous crew which the house contained, I was only speaking the truth.

He seemed relieved at my decision. “Just as you wish. I’ll have Pierre carry up a few bits of furniture to make the place more livable. Of course, you’ll take your meals with us.”

His words sounded more like a command than an invitation. “Of course,” I echoed lamely.

He beamed on me. “You must consider the house open to you at all times.”

“You’re very good. And until I can make some arrangements to leave the island——”

“Leave the island? But surely you don’t intend to desert us, Mr. Renfrew—at least for a while.”

I looked at him in surprise. “I have my business to attend to.”

“Oh, yes—naturally. But, for the present, you know—you’d be so much safer here.”

“Safer?” I repeated. “I’m afraid I don’t understand.”

“Don’t you? Well, of course, you’re the better judge.”

He motioned towards a divan; and, as we seated ourselves, he offered me a box of cigars. I chose one; and, for a moment or so, we smoked in silence,

my mind vainly striving to make sense out of the conversation. His eyes studied me with an amused gleam.

"You'll excuse me for mentioning it," he said at last, "but I think you're throwing away the chance of a lifetime."

"Indeed?"

"Yes. You see, I have certain—facilities, shall I say—for disposing of such matters with practically no risk whatever. In fact, though you may not know it, I'm pretty deep in the business myself."

I faced him, half-angrily. "What business, Mr. Hayward?"

"Oh, come now." He wagged his head. "You can't plead ignorance."

"But I do."

"Then you're either much wiser, or much more of a fool than I took you for." He gazed at me closely. "And I'm inclined to think it's the former."

"You flatter me."

"I can afford to. You're in my power, you see."

The sour grin which curved his lips made me shiver. He laid his hand on my knee with a little laugh. "Now perhaps you realize the liberality of my offer. I might take them all if I wished, and yet I give you your share—your equal share."

His words suggested a possible key to the riddle. “According to your belief you could hardly do anything else.”

“What belief?”

“Miss Hayward told me you were a socialist.”

He smiled broadly. “Oh, yes—of course. And you believed her?”

“I did—at the time—but——”

“Not now? Well, you’re right. I must have some fiction to cover up the real business, and that’s as good as any. But Sylvia believes in it implicitly,” he added earnestly. “Don’t forget that. She must never know about the other.”

I was entirely at sea again. “What other?”

He scowled. “Now, look here, Mr. Renfrew, this is no joking matter. If you won’t come into the bargain——”

“How can I, until I know what it is?”

“I’ve given you the terms—equal shares, and——”

“Yes; but the subject-matter. I’m afraid you’ll have to be more explicit.”

“Explicit? What guarantee have I that you’ll play me fair?”

I shrugged my shoulders. He glared at me angrily.

“You want me to commit myself, I suppose; and then, if things go wrong, you can hide behind me—turn state’s evidence.”

I started. "What are you suggesting—a crime?"

"You're the chief criminal," he laughed harshly. "You ought to know."

I was stung by the insult. "This is going too far," I cried, jumping to my feet. "I demand an explanation."

"You'll have it," he said, "when you hand them over to me."

"Hand what over to you?"

"Them—*them*. There's no use in quibbling over a word."

"It seems to be a quibble from beginning to end. You steal everything I've got in the world—everything; and now you want more. If you hadn't blown up my yacht——"

"By heavens!" he interjected. "You don't mean to say they were there?"

"How should I know?" I retorted, now thoroughly exasperated. "They may have been there or anywhere else, for all I care. If you weren't anxious enough about them to look——"

"I didn't know of them, then. Good Lord, what a fool I have been!"

"I agree with you," I said sarcastically, turning on my heel. "Good-day."

"Wait," he commanded; and at his stern tone, I halted. "I want you to realize your position fully. If they *have* gone up with the yacht, the fault's all

mine, and there's nothing more to be said ; but I shall insist upon your solemn word of honor as to the fact. If you refuse to give it to me, I shall consider that they are still in existence ; and I shall use every means in my power to discover their hiding-place—*every* means, Mr. Renfrew," he repeated with a cruel inflection. "And on this island my rule is supreme."

He waved his hand in a gesture of dismissal. I bowed, and turned again towards the door. As I crossed the threshold he called softly after me.

"Think it over carefully, and let me know your decision. We shall expect you to dine with us at half-past one."

I passed out without answering him. A girl's figure disappeared in a flutter of skirts around an angle of the veranda. It was Sylvia.

I stared after her in wonder, then back to the chair which she had left still rocking in the breeze. The corner of a newspaper peeped from beneath the cushioned seat. I drew it out curiously. A half-length picture of myself adorned the front page ; and above it, in three-inch capitals, was recorded the failure of Prescott & Renfrew. The date was the twelfth of June—yesterday !

CHAPTER VIII

—AND ITS EXPLANATION

So the blow had fallen—the blow which marked my ruin. I had been expecting it ever since the receipt of Prescott's telegram, but scarcely in the guise in which it had come. I stared at the accusing headlines for a dazed instant, striving to grasp their full meaning; then, as my glance wandered down to the two short lines beneath my picture, it was to find another shock awaiting me:

“MORTON RENFREW,
The Absconding Partner,”

was what I read.

A sudden emptiness grew in the pit of my stomach; it seemed as though the earth had slipped away from under my feet. I woke to a shivering consciousness of some one moving in the room behind me; and, turning with an effort, I crossed the veranda, and stumbled weakly back to the hut.

Closing the door with trembling fingers, I sank on the bed, and spread out the sheet before me. For a moment the printed letters, blurring together, danced like black imps across the page. Then, as

my brain cleared, a certain sense came into them; and halfway down a column I discovered the alleged reason for my accusation. It was in the following words:

“One of the most sensational features of the bankruptcy is the mysterious disappearance of the junior partner of the firm, Morton Renfrew. About a fortnight ago, it appears, he decided to take a short cruise on his schooner yacht, the *Naravido*. On the day of his departure he purchased on 'Change fifty thousand New York Railway 5s, which were intended as a holding investment for the firm. The bonds were delivered to him at the close of business on that day, and he brought them back with him when he returned to his office. There was some talk between the partners as to who should lock them up in the firm's box in the vault-room of the Columbian Trust Company; but Mr. Renfrew insisted so strenuously that he was finally chosen. He left, intending to deposit the securities on his way to City Island, where he was to join his yacht. James Riley, the custodian of the vault-room, remembers seeing him transfer some papers from his coat pocket to his box; but he was not near enough to recognize the nature of the documents. As he went out Mr. Renfrew nodded to Riley; and that was the last seen of him, dead or alive.


“It so happened that, until yesterday morning,

there was no occasion for any one to visit the strong-box. Then Mr. Prescott, together with several reliable witnesses, went to the Trust Company for the purpose of turning over the securities to the trustee in bankruptcy. On opening the box they found the envelope which had contained the bonds, stuffed with blank paper. The bonds themselves were missing; and, to make matters worse, it has since transpired that neither Mr. Prescott nor the broker from whom they were purchased, had kept any record of their numbers. Until these can be learned there is little hope of tracing the securities, or of identifying them, even when found.

“Mr. Prescott is quite prostrated at his partner’s act, and has offered in every way to assist the authorities. He has produced several letters mailed by Mr. Renfrew at various points along the coast, and has given, as well as he could, a general outline of the schooner’s itinerary.

“The police in the seaports have been furnished with a detailed description of Mr. Renfrew, and have been notified to keep a sharp lookout for the *Naravido*. Unless the yacht has vanished from the face of the waters, there is every hope that within a few days the man will be taken into custody.”

Then, after a flattering account of my business career, and a no less flattering list of my clubs and ancestors, there came the following news item:



“Squiduit, *via* Provincetown, Mass., June 11: The schooner yacht *Naravido* sailed from here at ten o'clock this morning, bound for New Bedford.”

And below this again:


“New Bedford, Mass., June 11, 11:30 P. M.: The schooner yacht *Naravido* is not yet reported. A fierce gale has been raging off here for the last few hours, and there is a fear that she may have foundered.”

I passed these last bits of information as of no importance, and returned to a second perusal of the main article. The only impression in my mind was that of mystified surprise: I was as much at sea over the disappearance of the securities as the officials themselves. I could remember clearly my visit to the Trust Company with the bonds in my pocket; I could remember transferring them to the box—could even remember the shape and color of the envelope which had held them. Riley had smiled at me as I passed him on my way to City Island; and I had returned his greeting. And from that time to this my connection with the securities had ceased.

It was not until the third reading that I began to realize the appalling strength of the case against me. Step by step, without a break, the circumstantial evidence of my criminality was complete.

And yet I knew for a fact that there were but two keys to the strong-box. One I had in my pocket at that very moment; the other was in Prescott's keeping. With nothing to show that the box had been broken open when it was robbed, his must have been the one used. But the paper made no mention of his having lost it, or of its having been stolen; on the contrary, it had stated that he had gone to the Trust Company on the morning of the bankruptcy, and had unlocked the box in the presence of witnesses. Thus, at that time at least, the key was in his possession. Had the person who had committed the theft returned it without his knowledge? Or had the key never been taken at all?

The paper reported that there had been some dispute as to which of us should lock up the securities; as I remembered the fact, he had insisted upon my doing it, much to my own personal inconvenience. The paper further reported that he had not been near the box since my departure; and yet our business required that we should visit the vault-room at least once every day. Here, on the face of his own statement, were two falsehoods, which had not been spoken without some reason; and that reason, I suspected, had been to incriminate me. His unparalleled opportunity for taking the bonds, the easy means of screening himself, which my departure afforded him—these but added to the presumption of his wrong-doing. A judicious silence,



and my own absence from New York, shifted the full burden of the crime to me.

Again I thought of that telegram which had started me homeward—that telegram which had *not* been signed by Prescott. And now I began to understand why he had not signed it—why, if he had known in time, he probably would not have had it sent.

I rose to my feet, and paced the floor feverishly. To be almost within sight of the mainland with no means of reaching it, to be virtually a prisoner, when my whole soul was crying for freedom—the thought was torture incarnate. At that moment I would have given a year of my life for half an hour's conversation with Prescott. But could I prove his guilt? If I returned to New York, would it not be only to find the doors of the Tombs standing open for me? Would I be given half an hour—nay, half a minute—to explain?

What had old man Hayward said? That it was safer for me here on the island? In a flash the meaning of his words broke upon me. He had read the paper, had learned of the accusation against me—and had offered his protection! Believing that I had stolen the bonds, he was willing to dispose of them for me—on equal shares!

With my head in a sad whirl I leaned moodily on the window ledge, and gazed out over the cold gray face of the sea. And the world seemed as shallow

and as cheerless as the waters before me. With Prescott a liar and a thief, and Hayward a criminal in thought, if not in act, friendship was but a veneer, honesty and integrity a sham.

Even Sylvia had turned from me, and at the moment when I needed her the most. I recalled with a pang those first few hours of our friendship—the dusky glow of her hair, as she tossed her head, a little trick which she had of lifting her eyebrows. How far away it all seemed! What had she meant by rebuffing me at the window? Did she believe me guilty? Or was she angry at me for the way I had treated Dick the night before? For the first time in my life I was conscious of a twinge of jealousy. In the bitterness of disillusion the emotion struck me with a sense of grim humor; and I laughed. But it was not a pleasant laugh.

I tried to forget the girl in a practical review of the situation; and as I considered the matter, there grew in my mind the ever pressing need for my return to New York. To confront my accusers and establish my innocence, or, if that were impossible, to give myself up—these were the only real points at issue; and I knew in my heart, that, whatever sentiment might dictate, conscience would allow of no other way.

Mr. Hayward's final warning came back to me with the force of an inspiration. What if I told him that the newspaper lied—or that the bonds had

been blown up with the yacht? Would he let me go when he found that they were beyond his reach? Or should I pretend that they were ashore, where I alone could get them? This would be the more likely tale. But, if he should insist upon knowing their hiding-place, what could I tell him? A lie would be easily discovered; the truth would make him even more suspicious of me than he was now.

I was still debating the point when Pierre's sharp knock at the door summoned me to dinner; and I followed him down to the house with a very confused notion of what course I should pursue.

Mr. Hayward, meeting us in the living-room, shook hands with me as cordially as though nothing had happened. I returned his greeting perfunctorily; and together we passed into the cozy dining-room, with its dark walnut furniture and silver-laden sideboards, where the others were waiting our appearance. One by one I was introduced to the members of the community whom I had not yet seen: Wadsworth, the man from New Bedford, a large-nosed individual, with narrow, squinty eyes, and a thin-lipped mouth, which hinted of avarice and cruelty in its straight red line; Bailey, one of the Gloucester fishermen, the embodiment of good humor in his short, plump figure; and Anderson, his mate, a tall, lank personage with a solemn face which smacked strongly of the cloth, and seemed strangely

out of keeping in this piratical crew. Sylvia and Pierre completed the list; and, as we moved to our places, I found myself in the seat of honor on the girl's right, with the Frenchman supporting me on the other side.

Dinner began in a sort of constrained silence; but, as course followed course under the magic rule of a middle-aged serving maid, Bailey's jesting remarks spread in a ripple of laughter around the table; and the way was paved for the usual small-talk of meals. Sylvia alone was preoccupied and quiet; and, piqued at her coldness, I made no advances towards conversing with her. Indeed, I listened rather to the chatter about me, hoping thereby to learn something to my advantage; but, whether by intention or chance, the talk was confined to the most trivial of every-day matters. Pierre acted as my interpreter, translating those passages which my ignorance of affairs on the island did not permit me to understand. But it was not until the meat had been served—a great haunch of roast beef, which could have been purchased only in some city market—that anything occurred which gave promise of an interesting explanation; and then, perversely enough, he turned me off with a manifest lie.

The maid had cleared the table, and was going off to the kitchen with a load of dishes, when another woman—the cook, presumably—brushed by her in the doorway, carrying two dinner trays. She

passed into the living-room; and, in crossing it, took one of the doors on the left.

“For Dick?” I ventured.

“Yes, M’sieu’.”

“And the other tray?”

“What ozzet tray?”

“There were two, you know.”

“Oh, were zere? Well, zat is for Deeck, too.”

“Is he such a great eater?” I demanded sarcastically.

“A ver’ great eater,” he assented blandly.

“But two trayfuls—for a sick man——”

“I am not his doctaire,” he began, then halted, as his eyes met Sylvia’s. “Nor his nurse, either,” he muttered in a lower tone. “Ask Ma’mselle, eef you wish to know.”

I glanced at the girl.

“Pierre has told sufficient,” she declared with cool hostility. “There is nothing more to be said.”

But there was more to be said—much more; and, though I remained silent for the rest of the meal, my brain was busily occupied with the tortured cries of the woman which I had heard the night before. Was she a captive, like myself, held because she had refused to enter into Hayward’s guilty practices? Would I, too, be placed in close confinement if my story about the bonds failed to please?

The thought sent cold shivers down my spine; and I finished my dinner with but little appetite. As

we rose from table, Mr. Hayward called me to his side.

"My usual custom, Mr. Renfrew, is to take a short stroll after eating," he said. "Will you join me?"

I knew what the invitation signified; and braced my nerves for the coming effort, even as I assented. He held the veranda door open for me to precede him, then followed me out into the air.

Turning to the right, we took the narrow cliff path along which I had come on the evening before, passing the low pile of rocks whence the strange voices had issued, and, further on, the tiny cleft, where I had seen the phantom vessel; then, skirting the southern angle of the island, we climbed a rough slope of shale, and emerged upon the high seaward wall.

A raw east wind, lashing itself rapidly into a gale, drove full against us. From the horizon rim to the rocks below, the waters swayed and tossed in a ceaseless tumble of foam. The white-crested combers, chasing each other shoreward, ran leaping at the cliffs, to fall back, broken, with a crash of thunder; and the spray, caught in the wind, spat its salty shower in our faces. A leaden pall hung lowering in the skies, ribbed here and there with a gray-black scud of cloud.

Staggering under the weight of the gale, I crept into the shelter of a boulder. But Mr. Hayward,

his legs spread wide, his hands clasped loosely behind him, halted in the full fury of the blast, and, throwing back his head, appeared to glory in the roar and tumult about him. His huge rugged figure, dominating the bleak headland, seemed the living personification of the storm. Indeed, as I watched him, something of the passion of the day flashed in his eyes; and when he spoke his voice rang harshly against the clashing cadences of the sea.

“It should be a wild night, Mr. Renfrew—a wild night for coastwise vessels. There will be ships wrecked before morning.”

“Poor souls!” I muttered.

“Ah, yes! But death in itself is nothing. A struggle, a gasping breath or two—and the eternal darkness. The way is made easy for you, when you once take it. But it is the fear of taking it—the confronting of death in life—that’s what makes it horrible. The fear of death in life,” he repeated slowly, shooting me a keen glance, “when you know there’s no escape.”

I made no answer. A faint smile of amusement played about his lips.

“What decision have you reached?” he asked quietly.

“None.”

“None? After reading the newspaper report?”

I shook my head. “It was startling, but——”

"I have no doubt it was. You probably didn't realize how soon you would be suspected."

"I didn't," I returned, then, facing him boldly: "Would you believe me if I told you that the report was false?"

"I would not," he said emphatically. "There's no use in arguing against facts."

"I agree with you. But suppose the facts point equally towards another person—my partner, for instance?"

"Ah!" The idea seemed to strike him as novel. "That might be possible. But how can you prove it?"

"Take me to New York," I declared; "and you shall hear Prescott's confession yourself."

He turned on me with a flash of anger. "So that's your little game, is it? Well, you won't escape as easily as that."

I saw my mistake. "Mr. Hayward, I give you my word of honor——"

"Give me the bonds," he interrupted. "That's more to the point."

"But I haven't got them."

"Bah!"

"It's the truth, nevertheless."

He shrugged his shoulders, and, turning, gazed seaward without a word. I pondered for a moment.

"How much will you take to let me go?"

“One-half of the bonds, or their equivalent in money.”

“Twenty-five thousand dollars?”

“That’s about what it makes.”

“But I’m a ruined man—a bankrupt——”

“And I have my safety at stake. With you loose the police might swoop down on me at any minute.”

“I shouldn’t blab,” I protested.

“That remains to be seen. At any rate, you will have to pay for the chance.” And then, in an impatient tone: “Well, what are you going to do?”

“When would you want the money?”

“Whenever you can get it—by Saturday, shall we say?”

“That’s rather short notice. You see, I’d have to make arrangements about borrowing——”

“Which means going ashore, I suppose?”

“I could hardly manage it otherwise.”

“Then I’m afraid you can’t manage it at all.”

His words, with their sneering inflection, stung me. “Very good. I have no further proposition to offer.”

“I can wait.” He bowed curtly as he passed me.

“I shall continue my walk alone.”

It was in my mind to demand what fate he had in store for me. But, as though he had read my thought, he paused a few steps down the path, and waved his hand towards the storm-tossed sea.

“Death lies out there, Mr. Renfrew; but we do not fear it, because we know it cannot reach us. It’s the fear of death when there’s no escape that makes it horrible.”

“I have no fear of it,” I retorted. “You can kill me, if you wish. I would rather die than enter into your guilty practices.”

“Ah! So you take that tone. Well, there are other means.” And, turning, he strode slowly away.

CHAPTER IX

WHAT I FOUND IN THE CAVE OF WHISPERS

THOROUGHLY disheartened by the interview, I strolled back along the way by which we had come. The last avenue of escape seemed closed to me. I had played my cards and lost—not from any want of skill, but simply because Mr. Hayward had decreed that I should not win. The gray vision of the future, rising before me, narrowed into an endless perspective of inaction, with companionship and comfort dependent upon the whimsical caprices of Sylvia, and my life hanging on the unscrupulous wishes of one man. And, in the meanwhile, the rumors of my wrong-doing would gain the credence of fact; and Prescott would reap the benefits of his crime.

Halting in the cleft of rock where I had watched the ghost-ship disappear, I gazed out over the gale-swept waters; and, with my mind still running on the thought of my imprisonment, a way of release seemed to open suddenly before me. There was a cave, of course—some underground inlet of the sea, which formed a natural harbor! When the boat

had vanished, she had simply run into the entrance in the cliffs below!

Trembling with excitement, I stole out on the projecting ledge, and looked over. And in the daylight I saw what the darkness had not revealed: a high-browed opening worn in the sheer rock beneath me, and rising clear, even now, above the wild smother of the waves.

The seaward passage was accounted for. But there was another outlet—there must be—one which gave access to the island. Where was it? In a flash I recalled the eerie murmur of voices which I had heard; and, scrambling back from my dizzy perch, I ran over to the group of boulders. On the further side, cleverly hidden amongst the rocks, I found it—a ragged hole burrowed into the earth. The weeds grew thick around its base; and, as I parted them, a distant roar of surf rose from the depths, and I smelt the dank, pungent odor of the sea.

For a breathless instant I peered into the black tunnel; then, mindful of the house near by, I drew back hastily, and glanced about me. Except Mr. Hayward's dim figure against the northern skyline, there was no one in sight. I was tempted to begin explorations at once; but caution prompted me to wait for darkness. And with an assumption of indifference which I was far from feeling, I sauntered leisurely towards the hut. To my surprise, Pierre met me in the doorway.

"I trus' M'sieu' will be satisfy'."

"With what?"

"Ze arrangemen'. I haf done my bes' wiz what Ma'mselle haf give me."

Mr. Hayward's promise crossed my mind. "Oh, the furniture?"

"Yes, M'sieu'." His face beamed with pride as I entered the hut. "Eet is not much, but——"

"I could want nothing better," I broke in, gazing about in astonishment.

And, indeed, it seemed as though the place had been transformed. A washstand and a dressing-table, each with its full complement of toilet articles, flanked the window. A heavy Wilton rug had been laid upon the rough flooring; and, from the center of it, the old deal table looked quite resplendent beneath its gay Oriental scarf. The easy-chair which stood invitingly beside it gave the room a homelike appearance. The lamp, and the generous pile of magazines and books, had evidently been borrowed from the Haywards' private store.

"Did Mademoiselle give you all these things?" I asked.

"Yes, M'sieu'. Eet was M'sieu' Hayward's orders."

"Ah, I see! Then, if it hadn't been his orders——"

"I don't know, M'sieu'. Eet was she who suggested eet first."

I felt rebuffed. "She has been very generous," I said awkwardly.

"Yes, M'sieu'. Some of ze things haf come from her own room."

He stated the fact dryly. But his words gave me a ridiculous sense of satisfaction. In spite of her coldness the girl could not be entirely averse to me, or she would not have denied herself for the sake of my comfort. I wondered whether I had not misjudged her; and then I remembered that I was on the eve of my departure, and that she would soon be only an incident of the past. There was a sense of regret in the thought; but I steeled myself against it. Sentiment could have no place in my life until my name was cleared.

"But, M'sieu' Hayward—he was ver' anxious zat you should be suited," Pierre was saying.

"Yes; but that was before he'd——" I stopped.

"Before he'd talked wiz you?" Pierre caught me up. "I know eet. But surely zat make no mat-taire."

"I'm not so certain."

He studied me with serious eyes. "Has M'sieu' done what I tol' him?"

"I told the truth."

"Zen ze bonds——"

"Are not in my possession."

"But, M'sieu'——"

"Not in my possession," I repeated. "That's why Mr. Hayward and I have fallen out."

He looked at me in pitying disbelief. "M'sieu' has been ver' foolish."

"You're right," I laughed. "I should have made up some story about their being hidden ashore."

"Yes, M'sieu'," he assented solemnly. "You would haf los' nozzing by eet."

"And now?"

He shrugged his shoulders in ominous silence. Still laughing, I threw myself into the easy-chair.

"Eet is not well to joke about eet," he said reprovingly. "Ze road of escap' is not so easy as eet may seem."

The cryptic utterance startled me. "What road of escape?" I demanded sharply.

"I saw M'sieu' stop beside ze rocks."

"Then you know——"

"I know zat M'sieu' was hunting flowers," he broke in quickly, "only flowers." And then, with a curious sense of caress in his voice: "I like M'sieu' too much to know anyzing else."

It was evident that he did not mean to betray me; but the fear of discovery, once aroused, was not easily downed.

"Would you stop me?"

"From peecking flowers, M'sieu'? Why should I?"

"Would you warn the others, then?"

He shook his head. "I can be blin', M'sieu'—an' silent too, when eet's needful."

I looked at him searchingly. "Perhaps you'd be willing to help."

"I would like to," he returned, though with no great alacrity. "What is eet zat M'sieu wishes?"

"A few cartridges," I pleaded; "just enough to fill a revolver."

"Ah, no." He drew back hastily. "I could not. Eet is impossible."

"Why?"

"Eet would be foun' out. An', beside, eet would be—what you call eet—dangerous."

"Dangerous? For whom?"

"For my frien's, M'sieu'. You forget ze people here are my frien's."

I rose to my feet, and, with my hands on his shoulders, turned him towards me. "Why don't you leave, them, Pierre?"

"Leave zem? M'sieu' Hayward, an' Ma'm'selle?" His eyes widened with indignant surprise.

"Yes—the whole kit and crew of them. Come with me—back to New York, where a man can make his way—live an honest life——"

"An' die of *ennui*. No—no, M'sieu', I could not stan' eet—not after here."

"You might ship on a vessel."

"Bah! I haf done eet—more times zan I can remember. An' what do I get? A dog's life, a

dog's wages—wiz a curse an' a rope's end at ze finish." He drew my hands away gently. "No, M'sieu', eet is ver' good of you, but—I stay here."

"With these cut-throats and robbers?" I persisted.

"Zey took me in when I was starving," he said simply. "I can not leave zem now."

"They took me in, too. But that doesn't prevent me from wishing to get away."

"To wish is not to win, M'sieu'."

I laughed. "You're very disheartening."

"Yes. You see, I knew ze ozzer man."

"What other man?"

"Ze one who tried before you."

"Did he come back?"

"No, M'sieu', he could not. He was drown'."

Pierre walked slowly over to the doorway, and screwed up his eyes at the weather.


"If eet storm to-night, M'sieu' will be here in ze morning," he announced definitely. "If eet clear—well, he will be here jus' ze same." And with a faint smile, half humorous, half sympathetic, he went off down the straggling path.

The afternoon seemed endless. A hundred times I threw myself into the easy-chair to read, and as often flung aside the book in disgust, and paced restlessly up and down the floor. Pierre's discour-

aging remarks had only added to my determination. Where one man had failed, another, better prepared, might easily succeed. At any rate, the scheme was worth trying. Again and again, searching for any possible weaknesses, I went over the details—the journey into the cave; the capture of the boat—a motor, I judged, from my dim remembrance of her; the long, blind rush through the storm. The storm! Was it not on that alone that my escape depended? With the waves running high over the mouth of the cave would I be able to work the boat out? Or, having worked her out, could I keep her alive in the mountainous seas?

I varied my weary pacing of the floor by long, anxious pauses at the window. But it was not until the end of the day that the wind veered suddenly to the westward, and little mottled patches of blue began to appear through the breaking clouds. By sunset the waves had gone down perceptibly. I went off to my supper in high glee.

The meal was a repetition of its predecessor—silent at our end of the table, noisy, almost boisterous at the end where Bailey ruled. But for all the light chatter I was conscious of an irritating sense of mystery—an undercurrent of excitement, for which I could not account. Mr. Hayward and Wadsworth held long, whispered colloquies; Anderson, like a watch-dog grown vaguely suspicious, threw somber glances in my direction; even Pierre's



gnarled old face seemed to light up with an expectant glow.

My first thought was that the Frenchman had betrayed me—that they were taking precautions to prevent my escape. But, as the meal progressed, I came to realize that my affairs formed no part of the secret. Indeed, my presence seemed to be a hindrance to their plans. And so, as we filed into the living-room, I was not surprised when Mr. Hayward, turning to me curtly, wished me good-night.

"You must be tired after all your adventures," he said with an obvious attempt at kindness. "I hope you'll sleep well. There is no reason for your barring your window to-night."

"I'm glad to hear it," I returned. "I've no desire to repeat my experiences."

"I should think not," he agreed, following me to the edge of the porch.

It had been in my mind to linger near the house for a while in the hope of discovering something. But Mr. Hayward's burly figure, standing motionless in the glow of the living-room windows, made the plan impossible; and I climbed slowly up the path to the hut, and closed the door with an ostentatious bang.

The next moment I drew it quietly open. The man had gone; but, under the shadow of the veranda roof, a dim white form moved silently. Sylvia had been left on guard.

Letting the door fall to again, I lighted the lamp, and collected the few things which I intended to take with me: a candle, a box of matches, the two empty revolvers, and a short iron bar which I had found in my wanderings—the bundle looked pitifully small as I tied it up in my handkerchief. But to-morrow, I assured myself, I would be ashore, where I could either beg or borrow what I needed; and the thought fired me with new courage.

I allowed the lamp to burn for some twenty minutes—ample time for a leisurely preparation for bed; then, putting it out, I drew up the easy-chair before the threshold, and opened the door once more. Sylvia, coming forward to the edge of the veranda, had seated herself on the upper step. She was still alone; but through the open windows behind her there came a subdued hum of bustle, broken occasionally by a rising murmur of voices. And now and then the black silhouette of one of the men flitted across the yellow oblongs of light. Once Mr. Hayward appeared in the doorway and spoke to the girl in a low tone. What she answered I could not catch, but from her gestures, I imagined that I was the subject of discussion. He went in again apparently satisfied; and she returned to her silent watch.

For an hour this strange espionage continued. Then, with startling suddenness, the noises ceased. I leaned forward in the chair, acutely conscious that

something had happened—was happening—and, straining my eyes into the night, divided my gaze between the house and the entrance to the cave. If a sortie was intended, the men must cross my line of vision in order to reach the boat. But the moments passed, and no sign of life appeared around the group of boulders. The lamps in the house still shed their unbroken radiance across the porch. Sylvia remained motionless at her post.

Puzzled, irritated, with my nerves strung to a pitch of excitement, I watched until my eyes ached. Then a clock in the deserted living-room struck eleven; and, as though the sound were a signal, the girl jumped to her feet and ran into the house. There was a faint rasping of bolts as she locked the door behind her; and, one by one, the lamps went out. Rising stiffly, I waited. A flickering light appeared behind the lowered shade of an upper window. I stole noiselessly over the threshold, and struck across the pasture towards the cluster of rocks.

The night was clear and starlit. A serene sense of calmness, very different from the clash and turmoil of the afternoon, seemed to hover over the world. The light breeze, running in whispers through the shrubs and grasses, blended with the far-off murmur of the sea into one gentle undertone of sound. Silence and the peacefulness of sleep lay upon the island; but, for me, it was the silence which

presages danger, the peacefulness which suggests a hidden foe. With stealthy tread I picked my way down into the hollow, and climbed the slope beyond it; and so, growing more cautious as I neared my destination, I gained the entrance to the cave without mishap.

Dropping to my knees, I listened anxiously at the dark opening. The plashing hum of waters rose to my ears in uninterrupted cadence; but the eerie voices of the night before were stilled. With a last glance around, I crept into the void of blackness; and, as I went, it seemed as though the night, the earth—life itself—had been shut out suddenly behind me. I was in a little narrow world of my own.

For a hundred feet or so the passage ran down steeply, and was so constricted in places that I was forced to lie flat upon my stomach, and drag myself along the ground. Then, gradually, the rough walls fell away on either side; and the low roof seemed to be lifted from me. I rose carefully to my feet, and found that I could at last stand upright.

With one hand on the rocks at my left, and the other stretched out before me, I now made better progress. And with each step the soft reverberating echoes of the sea grew louder, stronger; the damp breeze blew against my face with a fresher touch. I kept on steadily until the dim half-circle of light which marked the seaward opening appeared through the veil of darkness. Then, as the

path broadened, I slackened my pace, and stealing cautiously into the cave, crept down a little stony declivity to the water's edge.

For a moment I peered anxiously into the gloom, listening for voices, footsteps—anything which might betoken the presence of an enemy. The incessant splash and rumble of the waves filled the place; and the vaulted roof, taking up the rhythmic burden, answered in mellow whispers. But of suspicious sounds there were none. With a sigh of relief I lighted the candle and held it above me. The dim flare seemed to intensify the darkness. I caught a wavering glimpse of glistening rocks, of a high-arched cavern, of a long narrow bay of water, reaching out its length to the seaward passage. But the boat was gone!

For an instant I gazed at the empty stretch with a bitter sense of disappointment. Then a ghostly figure, rising suddenly out of the blackness, hurled itself upon me. And, as I fell to the ground, a wild shriek of terror rang through the quivering air.

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CHAPTER X

OF THE WOMAN WITH THE LOST MIND

SCRAMBLING to my feet, I glared into the darkness with frightened eyes. The wild cry still ran in wailing echoes along the vaulted roof; but the person who had made it seemed to have vanished. The waters rose and fell, and rose again, in their everlasting song; the breeze whispered gently in my ears; but, except for these, the silence was absolute. I crept back to the protection of the rock wall, and leaned against it, shivering.

A moment passed—another—and another, until I could stand the strain no longer.

“Who is it?” I demanded with a husky catch in my throat.

A low moan answered me.

“Don’t move, or I’ll shoot,” I said threateningly, turning in the direction of the sound.

“It would do no good: you couldn’t kill me.”

The voice was a woman’s, and freighted with a world of hopelessness. Surprised into action, I stole nearer.

“Who are you?”

“A soul in agony.”

"What?"

"The spirit of pain."

Was she making fun of me? Half angry, I drew still closer.

"What are you doing here?"

"Searching—searching."

"For what?"

"Happiness."

I laughed. "You haven't chosen a very likely place."

"The choice was not mine. But I would have found it—I had found it. And you came and drove it away."

Resentment woke a spark of life out of the dead calmness of her voice.

"I'm very sorry," I returned soothingly. "Perhaps, if I left you——"

"No—no!" The words rang out with startling vehemence. "It's not too late. We'll find it together—you and I."

The swish of skirts rose sharply out of the darkness; and I felt her icy fingers close about my wrist.

"Come!" she whispered. "Come now—at once! There's not a moment to be lost!"

"Hold on," I expostulated. "Where are you going?"

"Only a step—just one little step—and then rest—oblivion——"

She began to drag me towards her. The ground

slipped treacherously under foot; and, of a sudden, the horrible truth flashed upon me. I sprang at her with a choking cry. She fought like a demon, scratching, tearing, beating my face with her open hands. But I had grasped her firmly by the waist; and, though she struggled furiously, twisting and turning with a strength which astounded me, she could not get away. For one dizzy instant we tottered on the brink of the water. Then, with a superhuman effort, I swept her off her feet, and, lifting her in my arms, threw her roughly to the ground. A sobbing whimper broke from her; but she made no attempt to rise.

Striking a match, I found the candle, which had been dropped in the struggle, and, lighting it, held it close to her face. The weak rays revealed a countenance of singular refinement and breeding. She had been beautiful in her prime—was beautiful yet, in spite of the deeply penciled lines which time and sorrow had etched upon her forehead. The slightly arched nose, the firm-set mouth, the determined chin, all betokened strength and character. But it was a strength which had been, and was gone, a character which had faded into a mere shadow. And, as I looked into her eyes, I saw the reason. Fixed and glassy, with the dumb surface appeal of the hunted animal, in their depths there glowed the smoldering fires of madness. An ineffable sense of pity seized me.

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"You poor, tortured soul," I muttered. "Could you find no other way than suicide?"

"Can *you*?" she demanded bitterly.

"Yes. The boat——"

"Where is it?"

"Gone, to-night. But to-morrow——"

"Gone, too—or guarded. And if you did get away, do you think that would be the end of it? He'd follow you, hound you to the four corners of the earth, until he had run you down. And then——" With a ghastly gesture she drew her finger across her throat.

I shuddered. "One can take precautions."

"Against him? Impossible. There was another man who tried——"

"But he was drowned?"

"Yes. And by whom?"

"I don't know."

"By *him*."

She rose slowly to her feet, her eyes now dancing with insanity. I backed away from her.

"The day will come, young man," she cried, raising her hand above her head like a prophetess of woe, "when you will repent of what you've done to-night—when you yourself will seek escape, and can not find it. I know—I *know*"—her voice lifted into a shriek. "This is not the first time I've tried—nor the second. But he is always watching—al-

ways waiting. Oh, God! Is there no help for me? Can I never die?"

"You mustn't talk like that," I said in gentle reproof. "There's always hope if you'll only have faith and patience."

"I have had faith—and patience, too—for years. And see what they have brought me!" She gave a harsh laugh. "It's easy enough for you with your freedom and youth. But wait until you have worn out your life, as I have, and they lock you up, and guard you night and day. Then you'll talk about death, and wish for it, and it will never come."

"Perhaps," I assented, realizing that it might be dangerous to contradict her. "Don't think I'm blaming you. I sympathize with you very much indeed." And then, in an effort to divert her thoughts from her wrongs: "But you seem to be able to get away from them whenever you like, in spite of their watchfulness."

A sly gleam of cunning flashed into her eyes. "I tricked them. Oh, I tricked them so neatly! When they brought my supper I stole the key, and slipped another into its place. They turned it in the lock and never knew the difference. They call me crazy. But I can outwit them yet. And I will—I *will*." She raised her clenched hand in the air with a wild gesture of determination.

"Of course you will," I agreed solemnly. "Just wait your chance, and try the same trick again. It's

sure to succeed—that is ”—I looked up at her suddenly—“if your absence has not already been discovered.”

A spasm of fear shot across her face. She leaned over swiftly, and clutched me by the arm.

“Do you think it has? Do you think they know now—at this moment?”

“I can’t say. You’ve been away some time, you see. But if they have——” I shrugged my shoulders expressively.

“Oh, they mustn’t—they mustn’t!” She swung me around, and, with her fingers still grasping my arm, literally forced me over the slippery stones. “Come—come! We must hasten! I can slip in so quietly—so quietly. And they’ll never know.”

The scheme had worked to perfection. Still unwilling to provoke her anger, I allowed her to lead me as far as the shoreward entrance to the cave. But, as she made a motion to pass it, I drew back precipitately.

“Quick! Quick!” she panted, dragging at my sleeve.

“But this is the place.”

“No—no! Further on!” And then, as I still hung back, she turned on me with the fury of a tigress: “Come!” she commanded.

I followed meekly in her tracks.

Stumbling along the treacherous path, we skirted

the water's edge for some twenty paces. Then she swung sharply to the right, and, halting before a broad opening which seemed to grow suddenly out of the solid walls of rock, she waved her hand for me to precede her.

Again I hesitated. "Where does this lead to?"

"The house. Be careful, now—not a sound."

She gave me an admonitory push from behind. I plunged into the inky darkness. The tunnel, straight, and well paved under foot, sloped gently upward in what I conceived to be a northwestwardly direction; and, as I went, I began to realize how the men had gained the boat without my knowledge. Why had I not thought of a second passage? The simplicity of the trick was ludicrous—so ludicrous that I grunted audibly. The woman tapped me on the shoulder.

"Not a sound!"

I nodded; and for a few seconds we stole onward in silence. Then, as we crept around a sharp angle, she leaned over me suddenly, and struck my arm a stinging blow. The candle, dropping from my fingers, went out with a sputter. I turned upon her angrily.

"Look!" she gasped, her voice shaking with a new-born fear.

I peered into the darkness. A pale, yellow glow grew slowly out of the gloom ahead, flickered for an instant against the glistening rocks, then bright-

ened into a steady light as its unseen bearer came towards us.

With a cautious hand I drew the woman behind the shelter of the angle. Her obstinacy—her wild bravado—had fled. Like a terror-stricken child, she sank trembling at my feet, as though I were her last refuge. We waited in a breathless silence.

Inch by inch the weak rays broadened into a path along the ground; and out of the stillness there rose the sound of stealthy footsteps. Measuring their approach with my ear, I leaned forward, ready to spring. Then, as a tall white figure rounded the corner, I drew back with a sob of relief.

“Miss Hayward!”

But the girl’s eyes were fixed on the miserable figure at my side. “What are you doing here?” she said almost roughly.

The woman, her voice pitched to a pleading whine, began a long, rambling explanation. Sylvia cut her short.

“That can wait. You must come with me now. And Mr. Renfrew, too,” she added with a sarcastic smile, “since he has constituted himself your escort.”

Stung by her words, I would have retorted. But she turned her head with a careless toss, and, without a single backward glance, began to retrace her steps. We stumbled slowly after her.

The passage, ascending in a straight line for some

hundred yards, bent sharply to the right, and ran up to an open doorway. A dim light shone in the room beyond; and, as we emerged from the tunnel, I saw that we were in a part of the house which was new to me. Cases and packing-boxes stood ranged along the walls; pictures, furniture, clothing, bric-à-brac and knickknacks of every kind and description, were piled up in untidy heaps upon the floor; and in one corner the metal face of a large safe gleamed dully. It was evidently the storeroom—or, rather, the treasure-chamber—of the Haywards.

A lamp was burning low on a side-table; and, as we paused at the door, the elderly serving-maid, appearing from the shadow behind it, ran towards us.

“Thank Heaven, Miss Sylvia!” she cried fervently; and then, drawing the passive woman beside me into her motherly embrace: “Come, my lady—my poor lady,” she crooned. “We must go to bed, musn’t we? It’s so late—so very late.”

To my surprise the woman gave in without a word. Sylvia and I watched them as they crossed the room and disappeared through an opposite doorway. Then the girl turned upon me with a frowning glance.

“Now, Mr. Renfrew, perhaps you’ll explain what you two were doing in the passage.”

“We were making use of it,” I returned coldly. “It happens to be the shortest road from the cave.”

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"The cave?" Her brows lifted. "How did you come to be there?"

"That's my own business, Miss Hayward."

"I think not. It's mine, too, if it's in any way connected with—*her*."

"Your interest comes rather late," I said sarcastically. "You should have shown it an hour ago—before she got away."

The girl's lips tightened. "It's not for you to criticize."

"It's not for me to be silent," I retorted, with kindling anger, "when that poor creature is suffering. Why don't you send her back to her friends on shore, where she can get proper care and treatment? Why do you lock her up like a common criminal—torture her with horrors—drive her to the verge of despair? I can imagine the fiendish delight your brute of a father——"

"Stop!" Her face had gone white, and her eyes were flashing dangerously. "How dare you speak of him in that way—you above all?"

"I have certainly no reason to speak otherwise of him."

"You haven't? When he has taken you in and protected you—a thief?"

She spoke the word with sneering contempt. I laughed harshly.

"So you believe that, too?"

"Why shouldn't I? It's the truth, isn't it?"

"No. And you'll never hear the truth—as long as it's to your father's interest——"

But she cut me short with a passionate gesture. "Go!" she commanded, pointing a shaking finger at the doorway. "Go!"

I obeyed with a careless shrug, though I was raging inwardly. As I reached the threshold, she called to me to stop.

"A moment, Mr. Renfrew." And now her voice had sunk to an icy calmness. "You've accused us of holding a woman here against her will, of keeping her from her friends on shore—of treating her with cruelty. Perhaps you may change your opinion when you know of whom you speak: that woman is my mother."



CHAPTER XI

OF MYSELF, IN THE RÔLE OF ABDUCTOR

I LAY awake until dawn, footing up my account for the day; and the balance which I struck was far from satisfactory. Mr. Hayward's supposition that I was a thief might have been to my advantage; but I had more than offset it by my vain attempt to prove my innocence. I had found the road to the cave; but Pierre knew that I had found it. I had made a futile effort to escape; and Sylvia had caught me. And, finally, by my hot-headed defense of a woman who needed no defender, I had incurred the girl's enmity.

This fact worried me above all the others. If there were any one upon the island whom I wished to please, it was Sylvia. And yet I had flown into a senseless rage at her, been discourteous, insulting, and for no reason. I dared not imagine her opinion of me now. The memory of her last words still cut like the lash of a whip. It was not to be wondered that the sleep which overtook me at daylight was haunted with nightmares, and that, when it departed, it left me hollow-eyed and unrefreshed.

I dressed languidly, and strolled down to the

house in search of breakfast. Pierre met me on the veranda with a grave face.

"Is breakfast over?" I asked sourly.

"Long ago. But ze maid—she haf save' some for you. Ah! she bring eet now."

As he spoke the woman appeared in the doorway with a tray. Pierre, taking it from her, placed it on a table. I drew up a chair and sat down to the meal in peevish silence. The Frenchman watched me with a troubled frown.

"I fear M'sieu' has been foolish again," he said at last.

"Say unfortunate, rather."

"No—*foolish*." He laid stress upon the word. "Eef M'sieu' had wish' to escap' he should haf gone alone."

"I did——"

"But Madame——"

"I found her in the cave."

"*Foun'* her, M'sieu'?"

"Yes—found her." His evident disbelief made me angry. "Do you think I met her on purpose?"

Pierre's frown deepened. "Yes, M'sieu', we—zey—do. Zey t'ink you help' her escap' from her room here."

"What?"

He repeated the statement.

"That's ridiculous!" I expostulated. "Why,

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man, I never laid eyes on her until last night. I don't know now where you keep her locked up."

He shrugged his shoulders incredulously. "Zen who did help her?"

"Nobody, probably. She told me she had stolen the key of her door, and had slipped another into its place. She could have done that herself, couldn't she?"

"Not unless some one had giv' her zat ozzer key." And then, as he saw my look of bewilderment: "You know, M'sieu', she try to escap' ze same way night before las'. When you heard her scream Ma'mselle had jus' caught her. So we take every key out of her room. Ze one she use' las' night *mus'* haf been sent her from outside."

"And you accuse me of sending it?"

"Yes, M'sieu'."

"Why?"

"You were wiz her when she was foun'."

I was tempted to laugh; but there was that in Pierre's earnestness which warned me that it was no laughing matter. I began to question him in a more serious tone.

"How am I supposed to have sent the key to her?"

"Zey t'ink you tie eet to a string an' she pull eet up through ze window. You see, she would know what to do wiz eet from ze time before."

"Am I accused of that, too?"

He nodded.

"Perhaps they've forgotten that I was locked up in the hut until Dick broke in."

"No, M'sieu'. Zey remember zat you were *not* locked up—from supper to midnight. Zere was plenty time for you to fin' her an' tell her how to get out."

"But how could I find her?"

"She may haf call' from her window. When Ma'mselle went in at eleven to say goo'-night she was ver' excited; an' we discover' later zat eet was zen she change' ze keys in ze door. Las' night she change' 'em when ze maid brought her supper. Bot' times M'sieu' might have talked to her through her window before han', an' we nevaire know. Zen, again, M'sieu's talk wiz Ma'mselle las' night was agains' him. Eef he had no interes' in Madame he would nevaire haf said what he did." He paused and looked at me intently. "So, you see, zere is reason—mooch reason—for belief."

There was, indeed. It seemed as though some hostile fate were ever at my heels, pursuing me, drawing me into its toils, even while I slept.

"What does Mrs. Hayward say?" I demanded.

"Nozzing."

"Can't she explain how she got the key?"

"She say eet was giv' her—nozzing more."

There was no help in that direction. The woman, in spite of her simple exterior, had the shrewdness,

the cunning, of insanity. If she imagined it to her interest to be silent, no power on earth could make her speak. As a last resource, I broached the question of motive.

"Your story may sound well enough in theory," I argued. "But just look at it from the practical side, and you'll see how absurd it is. What object could I possibly have in letting Mrs. Hayward escape—to say nothing of taking her with me?"

"Ze ozzers think you might haf several."

"Such as what?"

"Such as b'cause you b'lieve we treat her cruelly. Ma'mselle say zat. But M'sieu' Hayward say you wish to get her on ze mainlan', an' hol' her as—what you call eet—hostage. Zen again——" He hesitated.

"Well?"

"Aren't two enough, M'sieu'?"

"I wish to know everything against me."

His eyes shifted from mine; and he drummed nervously on the table. "M'sieu' doubtless knows zat she is—gone in ze head—zat she try always to kill herself," he said slowly, falling back into the formal third person.

"I've good reason for knowing it."

"Ah! Zen, las' night——"

"She tried again," I laughed grimly.

His beady eyes flashed with sudden excitement.

"What happened?"

I told him. He drew a pronounced sigh of relief.

"So you save' her—you really save' her? Zen eet—cannot be true."

"What?"

"Ze ozzer reason why you help' her to escap'."

For an instant I gazed at him in perplexity. Then the meaning of his words flashed upon me; and I jumped to my feet in angry astonishment.

"Do they say I let her out so she could kill herself? Do they think I tried to murder her?"

He nodded.

"For what purpose?"

"Revenge."

I gripped him by the wrist. "Who accused me of that?"

"Eet was—zey on'y thought—p'rhaps——"

"Who accused me?"

"What diff'rence does eet make now? Eet is all past——"

"It's just beginning," I declared threateningly. "I insist on knowing. Who was it?"

He tried to squirm from my grasp. I tightened my hold.

"You hurt, M'sieu'."

"Tell me, then, and I'll let you go."

Tears of pain welled up into his eyes. "You won't say I tol' you?" he whined. "He would kill me eef he knew."

"*He?* Was it Mr. Hayward?"

"No—Oh, no! Eet was——"

"Dick!" I cried with sudden inspiration. "I might have guessed it—the low blackguard——"

But Pierre had clapped his free hand over my mouth. "Hush, M'sieu'! For God's sake, be careful!" And I saw that his glance had slipped past me, was fixed in a terror-stricken stare at something beyond.

I turned angrily. Dick, with his bandaged arm hung in a sling, was leaning easily against the door-jamb, watching us with an evil smile.

"I heard my name," he said slowly, "and a certain expression used in connection with it——"

I strode over to him. "Yôu'll hear worse than that before we're through. I demand an apology for what you've said."

He eyed me coldly. "I see no reason for apologizing—unless," he added, with a sneer, "you can prove it's false."

"I can—and I will. And when I do it will not be to your advantage." My hand trembled as I shook my finger in his face. "You had better watch out."

The words were spoken thoughtlessly, in the heat of passion; but he started as though they had touched him upon a tender spot.

"By Heaven!" I cried, "I believe you let the woman out yourself!"

"Your belief does you credit," he laughed, regaining his composure. "But let me remind you, belief is not proof."

"And bluff is not innocence," I retorted. "I give you fair warning: I shall sift this thing to the bottom, and, if I find it was you——"

"You'll find no one to believe you." He drew himself up in the doorway, and stretched lazily. "It's a dead waste of time, don't you think?"

"That remains to be seen. At any rate, I shall make the attempt."

He shrugged. "As you wish. I've no doubt Pierre will continue to assist you." And, throwing a contemptuous glance at the Frenchman, he swung on his heel, and disappeared into the house.

Pierre, his face twitching with anger, started to follow. I clutched him by the shoulder.

"Wait!" I whispered. "Don't quarrel with him. There's a better way of getting even."

"What?"

"Find out for me whether he would benefit by Mrs. Hayward's death."

CHAPTER XII

WHICH HINTS AT FURTHER MYSTERY

LEAVING Pierre to learn what he could concerning Dick's expectations, I climbed the path leading to the higher rocks, and strode moodily along the seaward wall of the island. The events of the morning had disturbed me more than I cared to confess. The charge of aiding Mrs. Hayward to escape was, in itself, trivial enough; but, coupled with Dick's accusation, it became a matter of serious importance. As the woman's abductor I might be treated leniently; as her intending murderer I could expect no mercy at her family's hands.

My instinct assured me that Dick himself was the guilty party; but instinct was not proof; and proof in this partizan community would be hard to find. If Pierre failed in his mission, or played me false, I was doomed indeed.

I had walked on blindly, too occupied with my gloomy thoughts to heed where I was going; and it was with a start that I woke to find myself standing before poor Simpson's grave. The low, rough mound of earth, rising upon the bleak hillside, struck

a chill chord in my heart; the death which overshadowed me seemed to be suddenly visualized.

I turned away, shivering, and descended the slope towards a little rocky promontory, which pointed its skeleton finger into the sea. A huge boulder marked its shoreward end; and, as I neared it, a hum of voices floated to me from the further side. I paused to listen. There were two of them—Mr. Hayward—Wadsworth. What fresh devilment were they planning now?

The breeze, blowing fitfully, wafted me scraps of their conversation. "Scheme," I heard, and "a good haul," and "no danger"; and then my name, qualified by "jackass" in Wadsworth's tones. I dropped to my knees, and, creeping in close under the lee of the boulder, stretched at full length upon the ground.

"——if he doesn't suspect," Wadsworth concluded.

"He won't—he can't. And, besides, if he does we'll frighten him. That business about the bonds hasn't been cleared up yet; and, with his attempt to get rid of my wife——"

"It hasn't been proved that he had anything to do with that."

"It hasn't been proved that he hadn't. We can hold it over him, anyway. It seems to me he has played right into our hands."

There was a short silence. I parted the long

grasses which screened the speakers from me, and peered around the corner of the boulder. Wadsworth, sprawled lazily upon the ground, was gazing thoughtfully out to sea; Mr. Hayward, sitting very straight beside him, watched him with keen eyes. I could have touched either of them with my hand.

"He's a slippery customer," said Wadsworth. "You'll have to move carefully."

"I shall. He won't know what's happened—until it's too late."

"And then?"

"It won't matter. If he talks he will only implicate himself."

"He may say it was forced out of him."

"He can't. What he gives will be of his own free will."

"Then you're not——"

"No—unless it's absolutely necessary." The old man's tone was decided. "We'll simply make use of his connections."

"Storm Newport, I suppose," laughed Wadsworth.

"In time, perhaps. We'll have to go at some of the smaller fry first."

Wadsworth shook his head dubiously. "I don't like the idea," he said. "Wouldn't it be safer to make your biggest haul first?"

"Why?"

"Because, as I said before, he's bound to suspect."

"He won't, I tell you," was the testy reply. "How can he?"

"He may read the accounts in the papers."

"I'll keep them out of his reach."

"But some one's sure to blab about it—Pierre, for instance."

"It's not likely. There are ways of making him hold his tongue."

"Good. But, if Renfrew finally manages to escape——"

"He won't."

"He has already tried once."

"And failed."

"Yes; but from outside circumstances—not because we prevented him. He'll try again and again, until he succeeds. And then, when he learns what has happened, his evidence will be damning. Once might pass as a coincidence; but, after that, everything will point straight towards us."

Mr. Hayward bit his lip thoughtfully. "There's a good deal in what you say. I hadn't looked at it in quite that light. What would you advise?"

"Make him one of us."

"He'd never consent—in that way, I mean."

"Of course he wouldn't—if he knew. We can trick him."

Mr. Hayward looked at the other doubtfully.

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"He's not easy to trick. I tried him with the bonds, and failed."

"He was prepared for you then. Now he'll know nothing about what's happening. And, besides, what we want him to do will be what he wants to do himself."

"I don't understand."

"I can't explain it fully till I've worked out the details. If you'll let me——"

"Go ahead." The old man smiled sourly. "We can decide later, when you submit your plan. But it seems to me it's rather dangerous—that is, until we have him more under control. You practically put escape within his reach."

"Yes; but I make that escape harmless to us. If he's silent, we're not hurt; if he speaks, he convicts himself. As one of the guilty parties his evidence won't be worth listening to." Wadsworth glanced up at his leader as though for approbation. "These are only suggestions, of course——"

"I understand." Mr. Hayward nodded his head good-humoredly. "And, to a certain extent, they fit in very well with a plan I have in mind—indeed, I might say they fit in splendidly."

"What is it?"

"To bind him to us—make him one of the community by something stronger than fear—make him one of my particular family."

"Sylvia!"

Wadsworth's start and my own were simultaneous. The grasses which I still held apart trembled so violently that I let them fall together. A great buzzing sounded in my head as I dropped my face into the soft turf, and strained my ears to listen.

"He's too valuable to lose," Mr. Hayward was saying. "He has the *entrée* with too many rich people. I shall welcome him gladly as my son-in-law."

"But Sylvia?"

"She'll do what I tell her—or take the consequences. There will be no trouble in that direction. The main difficulty is with Renfrew. We must coax him into the notion. I have an idea he's already a little interested."

"Don't forget Dick," Wadsworth warned him.

"I shan't. If he gets ugly, I'll ship him ashore. He's at the bottom of half of the disturbances here, anyway."

Wadsworth considered. "Suppose Sylvia should prefer him——"

The old man laughed. "We're not dealing with preferences," he said cruelly. "There's no question of love or affection. It's simply a matter of business—of expediency."

The brutal words made my blood boil; I could have knocked the man down for this callous bartering of his daughter's happiness. As it was, I

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started upright, and, in doing so, struck my heel noisily against the boulder. Wadsworth heard me.

"What was that?"

"What?"

"It sounded as if something had hit the rock. By Heavens—I believe we've been spied upon!"

He scrambled hastily to his feet, followed more leisurely by Mr. Hayward. Crouching back in my place, I could see them peering over the boulder.

"No one's there," announced the old man.

"There doesn't seem to be. But we'd better make sure." And Wadsworth, beckoning, led the way around the opposite corner.

As the men disappeared I crept to the spot which they had left, and hid behind a projecting angle. I could hear them pause on the further side.

"You're as timid as an old woman," Mr. Hayward laughed. "There's no one anywhere in sight."

"Perhaps not. But look at the grass. Some one has been lying there not so very long ago."

My breathing seemed to cease while the men examined the tell-tale marks.

"Yesterday, perhaps," Mr. Hayward declared at length; "not just now, certainly. We should have seen him running away."

"He may have hidden somewhere."

"If he has we'll never find him. Come, let's get

back to the house. We may learn something there."

Rising cautiously to my knees, I watched the men until they had crossed the pasture-lands. Then, turning, I crept down to the water-side, and, keeping to the lower rocks, gradually worked my way around to the sandy beach beneath the hut.

When I reached the house they were just sitting down to dinner. But neither Mr. Hayward nor Wadsworth made any comment upon my lateness; and, to my further relief, Sylvia did not appear.

CHAPTER XIII

OF AN OLD LETTER AND A NEW FRIEND


THE next three days passed quietly; and, indeed, after the stirring events which had followed so closely, one upon the heels of the other, since my arrival on the island, I was thankful for the respite. I slept, and ate, and slept again, storing up energy as the soldier does in preparation for the coming battle. I thought a great deal, too; for I was both soldier and general: it was for me to plan as well as to fight, to be on the watch for the enemy's moves, and to meet him with counter-stratagems. But where the surface life runs smoothly, without perceptible halts or jars, it is hard to pierce its depths; and, except for Mr. Hayward's frank attempts to win my friendship, and Dick's open hostility, I might have believed that the past had been forgotten, that the future held no cause for alarm.

The puzzling conversation which I had overheard remained unexplained, nor was any overt action taken to include me in the proposed plot. I was approached by no one, required to give no promises, offered no bribes. I lived, as I had lived before, a well-fed guest, whose comings and goings seemed

to be a matter of the utmost indifference. Whether the part I was to play was still undecided, or whether the time for execution was not yet ripe, it was evident that they had no fear of my escape.

For the rest, I was left much to myself, meeting the others only at meals, or in the daily routine of the island. Pierre, with his mission still unaccomplished, seemed to shun me; Sylvia I saw not at all. The Frenchman explained her absence by the fact that Mrs. Hayward was ill, and needed the girl's whole attention. But I had my own ideas on the subject; and read the reason for her non-appearance as a wish to avoid me. It was the one tangible clue which indicated that Mr. Hayward's plan was still afoot.

I had thought of the girl a great deal since I had overheard the old man's intentions regarding her; and his mercenary plan of bargaining away her freedom had let loose a flood of sympathy for her in my mind. In some way she seemed to have grown closer to me—closer, not from any personal intimacy, but through a curious mental projection of her upon my inner vision. I saw her now as a defenseless victim, waiting to be sacrificed for the sake of her father's greed. The picture of her helplessness lent her a new and distinctly feminine charm in my eyes, awoke my dormant spirit of chivalry. I must protect her—save her from her father's wiles at any cost. It must not be imagined that the idea



of Sylvia as my wife was displeasing to me; indeed, with this infamous scheme of the old man's hanging over us, I dared not allow myself to consider it at all. My only thought was to exercise the privilege of my sex, and act as her self-appointed defender. But the time was not far off when I was to realize how nearly such quixotism was allied to love.

Matters stood thus on the fourth afternoon, when, as I strolled up the path to the seaward cliffs after dinner, I caught a glimpse of Anderson, the surly fisherman, slipping hurriedly out of sight around the further corner of the cluster of rocks which marked the entrance to the cave. He had left the table early under pretense of feeling unwell; but neither his present occupation nor his agility in hiding himself was in keeping with the rôle of a sick man. Vaguely suspicious, I hastened my steps to catch up with him. As I rounded the bowlders, he rose quickly from before the opening of the tunnel. A bulky valise, strapped as for a journey, was thrust half into the narrow hole.

"Feeling better?" I inquired.

"Not much."

"Then what are you doing out here?"

"Takin' the air—perhaps." He eyed me belligerently.

"Perhaps," I rejoined; "but it looks more as though you were going to camp out."

"Why?"

I indicated the valise.

"Oh, that!" He gave the bag a vicious kick. "They're only some old clothes I want to get rid of."

"Of course. And you're taking them to some poor fellow on the mainland. Very good of you, I'm sure." I glanced at him swiftly. "When do you leave—to-night?"

An angry frown creased his forehead. "None of your business."

"No," I agreed; "it's Mr. Hayward's."

He raised a threatening finger. "If you're goin' to peach on me——"

"I can't see anything else to do," I broke in suavely. "Can you? When one of his trusted lieutenants decides to desert him——"

"Trusted nothin's!" he exploded. "I'm through with him and his devil's brood forever."

His eyes blazed with sudden fury; and the lifted hand, closing tightly into a fist, came down upon the boulder with a heavy thud. I smiled quietly.

"So there's been trouble between you?"

"Trouble?" he echoed. "It's worse than trouble—it's hate—black hate."

He caught himself up quickly, as though he had remembered to whom he was talking. A sly, furtive look crept over his face.

"What happened?"

"None of your business," he retorted again.

I pondered for a moment. If the man had really

fallen out with the Haywards, he might prove to be a valuable ally; if he had not, his enmity was to be feared. In either event it behooved me to act circumspectly before showing my hand. I was conscious that he watched me closely while I deliberated; and, moved by a sense of caution, I waited until he broke the silence first.

"You don't believe me," he said. "You don't think it's possible for a man to live here as long as I have, and have a spark of honesty left in him. Well, I don't wonder at you. I only wonder at myself that I've been able to keep that spark alive. Perhaps I couldn't have done it if it hadn't been for——" He paused, his lower lip beginning to tremble; he dashed his hand hurriedly across his eyes. "I've got a wife on shore who thinks I'm dead," he went on slowly; "and I've let her think so. It would kill her if she knew what I'd become. I was honest enough until I landed on this blasted island, and got into the old man's clutches. He dragged me down as he has dragged others before me—as he's dragging you now."

I started. "What do you mean?"

Anderson laughed brutally. "You don't think he'd keep you alive unless he had some use for you? He's hardly that kind. When he gets his plan workin' he'll have you just where he wants you."

"What plan?" My voice was trembling with excitement.

Anderson grinned. "That interests you, don't it?"

I ignored his bantering. "Tell me what you know."

"I don't know anythin'—much. They've not honored me with their confidence. But I can make a pretty good guess at it. They're goin' to play your position for all it's worth—make a sort o' social highwayman out o' you."

"Yes—yes." His slow drawl irritated me. "I gathered as much as that, but——"

"You did?" he broke in, looking at me with new suspicion. "Where?"

"Nowhere," I stammered, realizing my mistake. "'Suspected' was what I meant. There have been things said which led me to believe they were trying some such game."

"Hm!" He was not entirely convinced. "What else do you 'suspect'?"

"Nothing. I hoped you could give me the details."

"I don't know any details," he said gruffly.

I turned away.

"Wait!" he called after me. "Let me think a moment."

I halted. He thrust his hands into his pockets, and stared frowningly at the ground. It was a full five minutes before he spoke again.

"Look here," he said. "I suppose you're goin' to give me away to the old man."

"There's no other course open to me."

"Naturally—naturally." A sour grin overspread his sallow face. "Unless I make it worth your while to keep mum."

"A bribe?" I laughed.

"If you like. I'll tell you all I know if you'll promise not to peach."

It was easy to promise what I had no intention of doing. "I promise," I said. "What is it?"

"This." He dived into his coat-pocket and fished up a crumpled letter. "Perhaps you recognize it."

I took it from him. It was an invitation from Henry Dubois, an old college chum, asking me to spend a few days with him at his summer home in Wood's Hole. I had received it some three weeks before on the *Naravido*.

"It belongs to me," I declared. "Where did you get it?"

"I *stole* it from the old man and Wadsworth—when they weren't looking."

"And they?"

"Probably found it among your things."

"But what on earth——"

He checked me with a wave of his hand. "Read it," he advised me.

I glanced down the soiled page. Dubois, reminding me that he had not seen me for a dog's age, demanded my appearance on the following Saturday.

"Or any date that will suit you, old chap. I've

brought my collection of jewels down with me, and want you to see them—particularly a fine African diamond——”

I looked up at Anderson. He was smiling broadly.

“‘Collection of jewels,’” he quoted; “‘a fine African diamond.’ Do you catch the meaning?”

“They’re going to rob him!”

Anderson nodded. “With your help.”

“My what?”

“Your help. You’re to supply all the necessary information—how the house is situated, where the jewels are kept, the easiest way to get at ’em——”

“They’ll have to kill me first.”

“But they won’t. The old man’ll have things so fixed that you’ll be only too glad to tell ’em everything. And yet he won’t appear to force you. He’s too clever for that.” He spoke bitterly, with a strange sense of assurance.

“How do you know?”

“He tried it on me—and succeeded. It’s an old dodge. He’s got it down to a fine point.”

From my own dealings with Mr. Hayward I was inclined to believe Anderson; the overheard conversation, with its vague allusions, came back to me as a further confirmation of his words. I felt helpless, powerless, hemmed in by mysterious forces over which I had no control. Anderson seemed to appreciate my predicament.

—“There’s one thing you might do,” he said slowly, “if you don’t mind the consequences.”

“What?”

“Lie to them—give them the wrong information. Tell them, for instance, that there’s plenty of water right up to Dubois’s float, and let ’em run aground.”

“But they wouldn’t—unless they drew over eight feet.”

“Oh! Well, you might direct them to the wrong house.”

“That would only mean that some other fellow would be robbed.”

“True. I suppose the houses there are a good deal alike.”

“The smaller ones, perhaps.”

“Then Dubois’s is a large one.”

“The largest there.”

“On the water?”

“Of course.”

“Near what point?”

The slightest hint of eagerness had crept into his voice; and I suddenly realized what I had been saying. If he had been Mr. Hayward himself he could not have been more persistent in his questions.

“I don’t know,” was my curt reply.

“You mean you won’t tell,” he laughed. “Then you don’t take kindly to my suggestion?”

"I do not," I retorted.

"All right. I'm afraid I can't help you then. You see, I leave to-morrow night." He paused meditatively. "I don't suppose there's anythin' more to say."

He turned, and began to shove the valise into the tunnel. I watched him silently. His words and the action had brought the vague outlines of a plan into my head.

"You leave to-morrow night?" I repeated.

He nodded. "At eleven, or thereabouts."

"Why not to-night?"

"Because—well, I can't."

"Oh, I see. The others are going to use the boat."

"Not at all."

"What is it, then?"

He sat back on his heels, and looked up at me. "Who's gettin' curious now?"

I flushed at the rebuke. "I beg your pardon. If you don't want to tell me——"

"It isn't that," he interrupted. "I was only jokin'—had to get even, you know." He smiled pleasantly. "But I know what you're drivin' at, and I'd have suggested it myself, only I thought you wouldn't take up with it. You want to come along with me."

I shook my head.

"You don't? What's the matter?"



"I don't like the idea of your putting it off till to-morrow night."

"Think it looks sort o' fishy?"

"Yes."

"Well, it isn't. I've got a matter or two of my own to attend to. But I'll tell you what I'll do. If you say so, we'll go to-night."

"And upset your plans?"

"I'll manage to fix things up this afternoon."

I pretended to consider. "You're sure it would be safe?"

"Positive."

"But if they should want the boat?"

"They won't—not until the end of the week."

I bit my lip to hide my satisfaction.

"You'd better come," he urged. "If I take the boat you won't get another chance to escape."

"I know. And if you take the boat the old man won't get a chance to rob Dubois. And that was what I wanted to put a stop to."

"Only that?"

"Of course," I laughed lightly.

"Oh, yes! Of course," he agreed in sneering disbelief; but the flimsy excuse had mystified him, as I had hoped it would. He scowled at me suspiciously.

"Then you won't come?"

"Not this trip."

I turned away as though the matter were settled.

"Let me know if you change your mind," he

called after me. "Remember—I leave to-morrow night."

"I shall," I answered; and, indeed, I had good reason not to forget it; for I intended to forestall him, and make use of the boat myself to-night.

As I entered the hut Pierre came forward to meet me.

"I thought you were nevaire returning, M'sieu'——"

"What's the matter?"

"I've foun' out about Madame. She haf money—lef her in trus'—till she die. Zen eet go to Ma'mselle."

"All of it?"

"All of eet, M'sieu'."

"How do you know?"

"I heard M'sieu' Hayward tell Wadsworth. Zey were on ze veranda, an' I was in ze house——"

But I was not listening. His words had led me into dark ways, where I feared to tread.

CHAPTER XIV

OF MY SECOND ATTEMPT—

PIERRE's story threw a dampening cloud over my spirits; and I went about the simple preparations for escape in a depressed state of mind. I told myself in vain that Sylvia and her actions were nothing to me; that I should be glad to leave her and her criminal companions behind me; that I should rejoice in the thought that I should never lay eyes on her or them again. But I did not rejoice; I realized fully now how she had crept into my heart, possessed every fiber of my being. Even her coldness had exercised its fascination over me; and, notwithstanding the strong proof against her, there still lingered in the depths of my mind a firm conviction that she was as guiltless as I, the sport of as evil a fortune. Looking back over the days which I had spent on the island I could now see how every incident in my acquaintance with her had tended towards the one end.

The first true hint of my feelings had come from Mr. Hayward, and was coupled with a sense of horror that he could sell his daughter so cheaply. But in the four days which had intervened, horror had

merged into pity, and pity had grown insensibly into love. It needed but Pierre's story, with its burden of accusation, to fan that love into flame. And now, when a new vista of happiness was opening before me, I was about to turn from it, to leave it forever. The thought made my task a bitter one, and difficult to fulfil.

Five times that afternoon I was on the point of giving up the expedition; and as often I returned to it, laughing sarcastically at myself for hoping where there was not the least hope. She did not care for me, I told myself, had never shown me the slightest favor. Our relations had never gone beyond the bounds of friendship; and even friendship seemed to have hung in the balance since my supposed connection with the stolen bonds had become known. If I remained her father would worry her with his plan, and threaten to force an unhappy marriage upon her. If I went she would gain by my departure; whatever loss was to be suffered would be mine alone. From every point of view it was better that I should go.

Supper-time found me still firm in this decision; and, as I watched the bare civilities which passed between Anderson and the others, I was further relieved to discover that the man upon whose story I had founded my plan of escape, had, at least in one respect, spoken the truth. It was evident that some serious rupture had taken place. Mr. Hayward's

elaborate display of hostility, Wadsworth's veiled allusions, Dick's jibes, and Bailey's sneering banter, were too pointed in their application, to be misunderstood.

Pierre, alone, seemed to hold aloof; and, waiting my chance, I began to question him cautiously.

"What's the matter with them? Why are they pitching into Anderson?"

"I don't know, M'sieu'."

"Has there been a row?"

"Eet looks so."

"How did it happen?"

"I don't know."

"But, surely, you must have heard something."

"I've heard nozzing, M'sieu'—nozzing at all."

I did not believe him; but, before I could question him further, some one kicked me sharply on the shin. I glanced across the table. Anderson was scowling at me warningly; and I suddenly became aware that the others had ceased speaking. I turned abruptly from Pierre with the uneasy feeling that they had been listening to everything we had said.

As we filed into the living-room, Anderson, beckoning to me, disappeared through the door leading to the veranda. I lingered for a moment or two, then slipped out after him. He was waiting on the lower step.

"What did Pierre tell you?" he whispered anxiously.

"Nothing."

"Oh!" He seemed relieved. "You ought to be careful of him."

"Why?"

"He's the old man's mouthpiece."

"He has been very good to me," I protested warmly.

"Of course he has. That's his game. He's got that insinuat'ing manner that makes you want t' confide in him. He's found out more for the old man than any other three of us put together."

He paused, as though to note the effect of his words. I met his glance with a look of unconcern.

"Changed your mind yet?" he asked suddenly.

"No; I haven't."

"Well, you're very foolish. They're goin' to begin to devil you to-morrow."

"How do you know?"

"I heard 'em talkin' about it. Look here!" He clapped me heavily on the shoulder. "I've got things about fixed up now. What do you say if we clear out to-night?"

"I don't want to clear out at all," I lied glibly.

"Oh, bosh! That's too thin. You'd sell your soul to get on the mainland—you know you would." He thrust his face close to mine, and eyed me

angrily. "What's the matter? Got another scheme on foot—or don't you like my company?"

I drew back from him. "You can take your choice."

"Hm! I have," he grunted, turning away.

But he had put a disturbing thought into my head. "Are you going to-night, by yourself?"

"Not a bit of it. I'll wait over and see the fun to-morrow. When they get through with you, you'll be glad enough to come along."

"Perhaps," I laughed.

"Dead sure," he retorted, swinging on his heel, and disappearing around the corner of the house.

I climbed slowly up the path to the hut.

The next few hours were endless. Following my former plan, I pottered about the place until bedtime, then, lounging in the darkened embrasure of the doorway, watched impatiently for the lamps in the living-room to go out. But, as ill luck would have it, the Haywards seemed to have chosen this particular evening for staying up late. It was half-past eleven when the last light was extinguished, and close upon midnight before I finally dared to set out.

A thin mist had risen over the lowland; but the night was calm and starlit, with the faint promise of a late moon hovering in the eastern sky. I paused for an instant, noting the weather with satisfaction,

then struck diagonally across the pastures to the entrance of the cave. With the aid of a dark lantern, which I had found in the Haywards' store-room, I made a rapid examination of the cluster of bowlders; but the strong rays revealed nothing suspicious. The place seemed to be deserted; even Anderson's valise had disappeared.

Deciding that he had hidden it in the tunnel, I shut off the light, and crept cautiously into the narrow opening; but, though I searched carefully, I made the passage without discovering it. Had he lied to me, or changed his plans since I had seen him? Had he gone to-night, after all? I emerged from the tunnel with the uneasy feeling that he had tricked me; and it was with a sense of relief that I caught sight of the boat, standing out black against the seaward entrance beyond. Whatever his intentions were, he had not yet gone.

I turned to the right, and, skirting the shore, clambered out warily on a narrow shelf of rock, which formed a natural landing-stage along one side of the cave. The boat, straining idly at her hawsers, lay dark and silent in the gloom below. I listened in vain for any sign of life on board of her, then, slipping back the slide of the lantern, stepped down on the deck.

At first glance one might have thought that she had been swept by a cyclone. From the bow, where I stood, to the dim contour of the stern, was one

bare expanse. Even the wheel and the binnacle had been sunk into a curious depression, like a round well, on the forward deck. But it was the more serious detail of her length which claimed my attention; and, as I stole aft, counting off the paces, my heart sank. She was too large—much too large—for a single man to handle. I had come expecting to find a launch, and had found a full-fledged yacht.

There was an open hatchway near the stern; and, in the vague hope of discovering some contrivance which connected the machinery with the steering-gear, I climbed down the rude ladder. The lantern light, piercing the darkness, displayed the meager furnishings of a cabin—a table, secured to the rough flooring, a few empty bunks, a locker or two, and in one corner a well-filled rack of fire-arms. I picked my way forward towards a low opening cut in the partition which divided the boat amidships, and crept into the engine-room. The machine was a motor of the latest pattern. I examined it carefully, noting its ingenious construction, its evident capabilities for swiftness. Nothing which could insure speed and smooth running had been neglected; but the connection which I sought for was not to be found.

Thoroughly discouraged, I rose from my search, and threw a last look about me. The cylindrical form of the well which held the steering-gear above, loomed at my elbow; beyond, the hull narrowed into

the dim recesses of the prow. There was no hope in that direction. I turned back into the cabin. If I were to escape at all, I must depend upon Anderson's pleasure to-morrow—or to-night! My heart stopped beating as I caught the faint sound of a foot-fall on the deck above.

I closed the slide of the lantern and waited. There was an instant of absolute silence. Then came another soft tap, and another; and the boat heeled slightly towards the landing-place with the added weight. If it were Anderson, he had brought company with him. I turned blindly to the engine-room, and, in the hurry of retreat, ran full tilt into a stool. It fell crashing to the ground.

Stumbling on through the opening, I hid behind the partition and listened for the expected alarm. There was the same curious patter of feet as three more men came over the side; but I could detect no commotion, no excitement. The stealthy movements overhead went on as though nothing had happened.

A moment passed; and I was about to venture out again, when from the stuffy darkness aft, I heard the slow, deliberate scrape of some one descending the ladder. I drew away from the partition. The man paused at the bottom to strike a match, then, with the light held before him, came towards me. By the dim flame I made out Dick's features. The match spluttered out as he reached the opening; but he

entered the engine-room without hesitation. I stole noiselessly into the bow and crept behind a loose pile of ropes and tackle. To my unspeakable relief he halted beside the motor.

There followed an interval of strained attention. Dick's low grumbling as he potted about the machinery alone broke the silence. Then, with a heavy thud, the forward hawser was thrown on the deck above; a bell jangled; and the engine, stirring from its lethargy, whirred gradually into motion.

How I passed the next half hour I can hardly tell you. My anger at being tricked, the fear of discovery, the thousand and one plans of escape which chased through my brain, are all inextricably mingled with the gentle roll of the vessel, the soothing murmur of the waters, as they curled away from the prow. I imagine that I dozed; for my first conscious sensation was that of some one moving near by; and, as I crouched back, a strong light flashed suddenly in my face. Bailey was looking down at me with his broad smile.

"So you came, after all?" he said quietly. "That's good. The old man's expecting you."

He beckoned to me. I rose, and, still dazed with sleep, followed him without a word.

CHAPTER XV

—AND WHAT CAME OF IT

BAILEY led me aft into the cabin, where a light was now burning. As we entered, Mr. Hayward, looking up from a chart spread out on the table, greeted me with a little nod.

"So Bailey found you. Anderson said he thought you'd be somewhere forward."

I remained silent. He sat down on a stool, and, picking up a smoking cigar from the edge of the table, flicked off the ashes with a quiet smile.

"He fooled you nicely, didn't he? He's pretty good at that sort of thing. You see, he was an actor in the old days. Did you suspect anything?"

Again I did not answer. He shot me a piercing glance.

"Hm! You did. Anderson thought as much when you refused to go with him. That's why he suggested it would be safe for you to escape to-night."

I began to realize the nature of the trap which had been laid for me.

"It made us hurry a bit," the old man concluded; "but it gained us the pleasure of your company, and

that was what we were working for. You see, it's quite important for us to have you with us."

I could stand his bantering no longer. "If you think I'm going to give you any information——"

"My dear boy!" He raised his hand reprovingly. "Don't even imagine such a thing. I'd never ask a man to betray his friend. Besides," he added, smiling, "we know enough of the essential facts already."

His hypocrisy sickened me. "Then what——"

"Have patience." He glanced at Bailey with a slight gesture of dismissal. "Tell Anderson to come down in ten minutes."

The man nodded as he turned towards the ladder. Mr. Hayward waited until he had disappeared through the hatchway above.

"Now," he said, "to be frank with you, we want you to join us—not as a common burglar—'one of the gang,' as you would probably term it; but as a sort of silent partner. Most, if not all of your work can be done on the island. You need never come on any of our—hm!—little expeditions, unless you wish."

"That's very kind of you," I said sarcastically.

He ignored the remark. "You have certain business connections on the mainland—a general knowledge of a good many banking houses and offices, and the peculiarities of their construction—in some cases, perhaps, a particular knowledge of

where the more valuable securities are kept. This knowledge we buy from you, and, in return, give you a part of the proceeds. At first you will share equally in the profits, and but little in the danger. Later on, if things turn out as I hope they will, we may send you on shore to do some prospecting on your own account. In that event your standing in the business world will be of immense value. The information you can get us——”

“You forget,” I broke in harshly, “about that little affair of the bonds. Whatever standing I may have had has gone completely now.”

“I do *not* forget,” he returned. “And, if you join us of your own free will, I’ll see that it’s cleared up properly. If you don’t——” He smiled his quiet smile.

“You needn’t go any further,” I retorted. “My life is in your hands; but my honor isn’t. You can kill me if you like——”

“We weren’t speaking of honor,” he answered coldly; “nor of killing, either. Your life is too valuable to us. How does the proposition strike you?”

“I wouldn’t even consider it.”

“You refuse to come in with us?”

“Most certainly.”

“Then we’ll have to try another way.”

A possible clue to his words flashed on me. “If you think I’ll allow your daughter to be forced into

marriage with me, you're very much mistaken," I said hotly. "I'll have nothing to do with such an infamous bargain."

"So-o-o!" He drew out the exclamation in a tone of genuine surprise. "You know that part of my plan?"

"I heard you discussing it with Wadsworth on the rocks," I said recklessly.

"Ah! Of course! The marks on the grass. So you don't take kindly to the idea? What's the matter? I thought you rather admired Sylvia."

"That has nothing to do with it."

"It has everything to do with it—it's the gist of the whole matter." He leaned over the table confidentially. "Come, now. Haven't you been drawn to her a little bit? Isn't there something in your feeling towards her stronger than friendship—something analogous to—love?"

He shot out the word with studied emphasis. I tried to answer back—to deny the charge, but could not. I seemed to have become suddenly tongue-tied. He saw the red blood mount into my face; and his lips parted in a broad smile.

"There is!" he cried, thumping the table heavily. "I didn't think I could be mistaken. My boy, you have my best wishes. There's no one on earth I'd rather have as a son-in-law."

He reached over, as though to pat me on the shoulder. I started back angrily.

"None of that," I warned him.

"A bit touchy, eh?" he laughed. "Well, it's only natural. I was myself, about Mrs. Hayward—at first. It's the chivalry of youth."

He drew a long puff from his cigar, and gazed at me benignantly. I returned his glance with sullen hatred.

"The chivalry of youth," he repeated ruminatively, watching the smoke twist upwards into the heavy air.

I continued to study him, searching behind his mask of villainy for some hint as to what the real man had been. His cold-blooded power both fascinated and repelled me. He had all of the desirable characteristics of a strong man; but he had wilfully perverted them by his evil-doing. I could easily imagine how his wife might have worshiped him until the shock of his misdeeds had snapped some cord in her brain. Poor Sylvia! What a heritage of trouble she had been born to! I realized now to whom she owed her gentleness, to whom she owed her force of character. And yet, in neither case, were the qualities stained by insanity or crime.

For a time there was a silence, broken only by the subdued whir of the machinery, and the creaking of the timbers, as the boat nosed her way through the seas. Then a pair of legs appeared in the black square of the hatchway; and Anderson came clat-

tering down the ladder. The old man turned briskly at the sound.

"You're late," he declared, scowling.

"You said in ten minutes——"

"Is it only that?" He beckoned the fisherman aside, and his voice dropped to a whisper.

I strained my ears to catch what he was saying; but except for Dubois' name, and the word "watch-man," accompanied by a covert glance in my direction, I could make out nothing. Anderson bobbed his head in ceaseless assent to the old man's orders; and when at last they swung towards me, his face was lighted with a satisfied grin.

"I have put you in Anderson's charge," Mr. Hayward announced dryly. "You are to do what he tells you to, and nothing more. He has orders not to let you out of his sight."

"I'm his prisoner, then?"

"Dear me, no! You're simply under his protection—to keep you out of trouble."

He nodded brightly, as he turned back to his study of the chart on the table. Anderson, still smiling, jerked his head towards the ladder. I climbed up after him into the open air above.

The boat, urged to her utmost speed, was driving swiftly through the summer night. A dim shoreline, fading into the silver reaches of the moonlight, stretched along the starboard quarter; and ahead, over the port bow, a white light glowed and flashed

and glowed again, like a great eye, blinking on the horizon rim. I stared at it intently, trying in vain to fix our position.

"Tarpaulin Cove," said Anderson, in reply to my questioning look; "and the light astern's Gay Head. We've just turned into Vineyard Sound."

I nodded coldly. He laughed.

"You don't seem so hot about escapin'. Why didn't you take my advice, and wait till to-morrow night?"

His words stung me. "If you think I was fooled——"

"I *do* rather think so," he chuckled. "Don't you?"

I did not answer; a quarrel at this stage of the game would be disastrous. He saw the flush of anger on my face, and grinned complacently.

"It's a wise man who knows when he's had enough," he said. "I'll call you when you're wanted." And with a wave of his hand towards the forward deck, he turned to the hatchway and disappeared below.

I stood for an instant, staring into the mellow depths of the night. The old sense of helplessness had again fallen upon me—helplessness, coupled with the bitterness of defeat. The great eye yonder, losing its gleam of hope, winked at me sardonically; the boat, flashing through the waters, seemed to be guided by a relentless destiny; and the dim land

towards which she bore me lay under a gray cloud of doom. I was startled by a light touch on my shoulder.

“I am sorry, M’sieu’—a t’ousand times sorry. Eef I had known, I might haf warn’ you. But zey would not tell me. Is zere anyzing I can do?”

I shook my head. “No, thank you, Pierre. I can manage to pull through somehow. Have you any idea what they’re going to do with me?”

“No, M’sieu’—excep’ zey will take you ashore.”

“Will there be any chance of escape?”

“I fear not, M’sieu’,” he said compassionately. “Not wizout help.”

“Couldn’t you——”

“I’m ordered to remain on ze vessel. You see, zey—distrus’ me.”

“On my account?”

He shrugged. “I s’pose so. I go down to take charge of ze motaire now.”

He advanced his hand with a timid gesture. grasped it warmly.

“It was good of you to think of me, Pierre.”

“Oh! zat’s nozzing—nozzing. Eef I on’y knew what zey meant to do wiz you—zat you would be safe——”

He turned away hurriedly. I saw him brush his arm furtively across his eyes as he went below.

So there was danger! I had already suspected it from the elaborate precautions which had been

taken; but now Pierre's words, and his withdrawal from the expedition, lent it a sinister signification. I wondered what lay in store for me on that shadowy mainland; I wondered whether I should live to see the dawn.

Wadsworth's head, emerging from the round well forward, and Bailey's heavy figure, lying prone in the angle of the prow, alone broke the flat expanse of the foredeck. There was little hope in that direction. I crept to the port quarter, and leaned over the low bulwark. Tarpaulin Cove now flashed astern of us; and the light on Nobska Point had risen over the bow. The moonlit shore stood out clear against the darkness. Would my strength hold out? Could I make the passage in safety? I gazed for an instant at the hissing, bubbling rush of waters over the side, then drew back for the final preparations. A shadow fell across the deck; and, as I turned, a heavy hand clutched me by the throat. Dick's face, distorted by hate, glowered close to mine.

"So," he muttered, "the old man and you have fixed it all up between you! He's going to sell you Sylvia, is he? Well, we'll see about that."

I struggled to free myself; but his hand tightened: I gasped painfully.

"You forgot I was in the engine-room, didn't you? Or perhaps you didn't care whether I heard or not. Which was it?"

He emphasized the question by a jerk. I began to choke.

"You don't answer," he laughed. "Well, I'll give you eternity to think it over in."

His other arm swept about my waist; I felt myself being forced back towards the side of the vessel. The horror of death lent me strength; and with a superhuman effort I broke from him. He made a vicious lunge at me; and, as we clinched, I stumbled, bearing him down heavily to the deck.

There was an instant of blind fighting; then some one, grabbing me by the collar, flung me roughly to one side.

"You fools!" Bailey's voice whispered.

And, as I scrambled to my feet, Mr. Hayward's head appeared in the hatchway.

"What's this? What's this?" he demanded angrily.

"Just a little boxing bout," said Bailey. "The honors seem t' be even."

"Oh! Mr. Renfrew?" The old man scowled at me.

"Better ask your nephew," I advised sullenly.

"Ah! I see." He swung on Dick, who was standing beside Bailey. "How often have I told you to keep your temper? If this happens again I'll run you off the island. Do you understand?"

Dick sniffed disdainfully. Mr. Hayward's eyes blazed with sudden wrath.

“Go below!” he thundered. “And stay there until I call you. You’re not wanted to-night.”

The man obeyed with a shrug of indifference. Mr. Hayward turned again to me; but before he could speak there came a low cry of warning from Wadsworth forward. A slender pierhead loomed close over the port quarter; and an instant later the boat rubbed gently against the side of a float.



CHAPTER XVI

THE GENTLE ART OF BURGLARY

IN the dead silence which followed Bailey jumped ashore, and lashed the vessel to the float. Anderson appeared from the hatchway with a heavy bag which he handed to Mr. Hayward, then turned to me, as the old man and Wadsworth clambered over the side. I measured the distance to the landing with my eye.

"Put out your flipper," said Anderson, displaying a pair of handcuffs.

I made as though to obey him, then, dodging suddenly, leaped for the shore. My foot slipped on the float, and threw me. But I was up in an instant, fighting my way blindly through the group of men towards the gang plank. I struck out wildly right and left, knocking Bailey clean off his feet with the fury of my attack. I drove at Wadsworth; but the old man, rushing my flank, met me with a clubbed revolver; and before I could duck the cruel blow had caught me on the head.

When I came back to a dazed consciousness, Anderson, bending over me, had snapped a handcuff on

my wrist, and, with a dexterous twist, was slipping its mate on his own.

"Now," he growled, "if you try such tricks again you've got t' take me with you. Mum's the word, you know."

He pulled me to my feet. Mr. Hayward, motioning us to follow, climbed the gang plank, and led the the way along the pier to the shore. As we straggled after him I noticed in a vague sort of way that the men were all masked.

By this time my head had begun to throb terribly; and sharp pains kept chasing each other back and forth across my eyes. I was hazily aware of a narrow path winding up through dense shrubbery, of the men's dark figures in front of me, of a patch of moonlit lawn beyond. Then Mr. Hayward, turning aside on the edge of the open space, stole cautiously into a clump of bushes. The others crawled in after him, Anderson dragging me down roughly into a veritable tangle of twigs. Sick and dizzy, I tried to struggle into a more comfortable position. He swung on me fiercely.

"None o' that," he muttered.

"You hurt me," I complained.

"I'll hurt you worse if you don't keep quiet. Can you feel that?" He pressed the cold muzzle of a revolver against my cheek.

I made no further resistance.

In the dull moonlight, which filtered down

through the heavy foliage, I could dimly make out the forms of Mr. Hayward and Wadsworth, squatting on the ground an arm's length away. Bailey had crept to the outer fringe of the bushes, and, lying flat on his stomach, appeared to be watching. As I looked, Mr. Hayward leaned over and gave him something. He took it without turning his eyes from the clearing in front.

There followed a long silence. The old man and Wadsworth sat like two carven figures; Bailey remained in rigid attention at his post. A light breeze, rustling through the shrubbery, parted the leaves before me; and in the tiny vista I caught a glimpse of Dubois' house, standing in ghostly outline on the further side of the lawn. Something wet and sticky began to trickle down over my forehead and run into my eyes. I leaned forward to shake it out; but Anderson jerked me back sharply. And, on the instant, Bailey raised his hand.

Out of the deep stillness of the night there came the soft, steady crunch of footsteps. Mr. Hayward, turning at the noise, motioned to Wadsworth, who crept forward silently. Bailey climbed slowly to his knees.

A moment passed; and the steps, drawing ever nearer, grew more definite, more distinctive. Through the staccato rattle of pebbles I could hear a curious halting shuffle as the unseen pedestrian dragged one of his feet. The sound rang familiarly

in my ears. I crouched down and peered out under the low branches of the bushes. A heavy shadow stole around the further angle of the house; and the next instant the portly figure of Dubois' watchman came into view.

Mr. Hayward, reaching over, touched Bailey on the shoulder. The man raised a dark object from the ground, and held it in front of him. A thin yellow ray of light shot out from between his hands. The watchman saw it, and halted.

"Who's there?" he demanded.

No one answered.

He turned off from the path, and cut across the lawn, holding his stick before him in a posture of defense. A few paces from the clump of bushes he paused again.

"Who's there?" he repeated.

There was still no answer. Wadsworth, getting quietly to his feet, bent forward in readiness for a spring.

"Hm!" the watchman grunted, and drove the point of his stick straight at the light.

There was a tinkling crash as Bailey, dropping the lantern, wrenched the stick suddenly from his grasp. The man staggered back in alarm; but before he could run, Wadsworth had leaped from the covert, and was upon him, throwing him violently to the ground.

The watchman fought gamely; but he had been

taken at a disadvantage. And, with Bailey and Mr. Hayward to aid him, Wadsworth made short work of the business, binding the man's limbs with practised dexterity, thrusting a gag into his mouth and tying it fast. They lifted the heavy body between them, and flung it roughly into the bushes.

Anderson had drawn me to my feet at the first onslaught, but it was not until the others had finished their task that he gave the signal to advance, leading me through the shrubbery towards the silent figure of the watchman.

"No—no!" Mr. Hayward objected. "Not now. Bring him out here."

"But the watchman?"

"We can attend to that later."

The fisherman obeyed reluctantly. I staggered after him through the thick tangle, puzzling hazily over the meaning of his words.

Skirting the broad veranda, which extended across the façade of the house, we crept into the shadow of the side wall, and halted before the bulging front of a bay-window. Wadsworth ran his fingers carefully over the woodwork, then inserted the long, thin blade of a pen-knife between the window frame and the molding.

"Hm! I guessed as much," he snorted, drawing the knife out. "Burglar alarm."

Mr. Hayward handed him a glazier's diamond. Climbing on Bailey's back, the man cut around the

largest pane of the window, tapping gently on the lower edge of the glass to make it sag outwards. Mr. Hayward caught it neatly as it fell.

"Come!" said Anderson.

The two men beside the window caught us about the waists, and lifted us over the sill. We tumbled through the opening together. One by one the three others crawled in after us. There was a short whispered colloquy between Mr. Hayward and my guard. Then the three leaders crept off stealthily into the darkness. I fumbled for my handkerchief with my free hand, and, leaning weakly against a table, began to mop my forehead. It seemed as though a million trip-hammers were beating in my head; and the room was reeling giddily. Anderson gave a sigh of lazy content.

"We're on the easy job to-night," he said. "Nothing to do till they pinch the boodle." He peered about him through the semi-gloom. "Nice quarters your friend's got. What's this—the dining-room?"

I signified that it was. He turned to a heavily laden sideboard in one corner, and inspected the pieces gleaming dully upon it.

"Plate!" he muttered, stooping to the closets beneath; and: "Locked," he ended in disgust. "Your friend's a careful householder."

"He has need to be, it appears," I grunted.

"Quite right—quite right," he agreed pleasantly,

dropping into the armchair at the head of the table, and motioning me to take a seat beside him.

A long silence fell upon us. Anderson, throwing out his legs, gazed dreamily up at the ceiling. I wound the handkerchief into an improvised bandage about my head; and, settling into the stiffbacked chair, endeavored to collect my dazed senses in readiness for the next move. The open doorway leading into the hall faced us across the table; and, as my eyes grew accustomed to the darkness, I made out a thin thread of light stretching a few feet along the opposite side of the passage. The men had found their way into Dubois' study. Now and then murmured snatches of conversation floated to my ears, or the muffled click of tools, as they broke open the safe in which the owner kept his jewels; but, for the most part, they worked in absolute silence. I tried in vain to think of some way to warn the household; but the stunning effect of the old man's blow had not yet worn off; and my brain still worked spasmodically. I was wondering whether I could manage to overturn the table when Mr. Hayward, reappearing, called to us softly from the door.

"We've got the swag," he announced. "All ready."

Anderson pulled me from the chair. As we passed the sideboard the fringed edge of the cloth upon it brushed my fingers; and, on the impulse, I gave it a vicious jerk. The heavy silverware, fly-

ing in all directions, fell to the wooden flooring with a deafening clatter.

Anderson turned on me angrily. "You damned fool——"

But the old man cut him short. "It's all right. Take him out to the foot of the stairs and wait. Ah, I thought so!"

There was the sound of a door opening on the floor above, and Dubois' sleepy voice demanded the cause of the racket.

"Don't let him give the alarm," Mr. Hayward cautioned. "Shoot, if necessary."

Anderson, nodding, drew me into the hall. As we passed the study door Wadsworth and Bailey stole by us, carrying the bag between them. We stopped beside the staircase.

There was an instant's pause. Then a soft patter of feet ran along the landing overhead, and came down the stairs towards us. With an effort I shook off my lethargy.

"Take care!" I called.

The steps halted. "Who is it?"

"Renfrew."

"Renfrew?" Dubois' tone was skeptical. "What are you doing here?"

I hesitated for the fraction of a second; and in the stillness Anderson's revolver clicked loudly.

"Look out!" I cried.

But Dubois had already leaped down the remain-

ing stairs, and was running for his life towards the front of the hall.

"The telephone!" gasped Anderson.

A blinding flash cleaved the darkness; and, as the shot rang out, I could hear the dull thud of a falling body. Hardly noticing that Anderson had released me, I started forward in horror, and dropped to my knees beside the prostrate form. The strong rays of the fisherman's lantern suddenly illumined the wounded man's face.

"My God, Mort!" he gasped. "How could you do it?"

"I didn't," I protested. "I *didn't*. Can't you believe me?"

But the ears had become deaf; the closing eyes were glazed with the fixed stare of unconsciousness. I made one last effort to arouse him, then rose in despair. Anderson, catching me by the arm, snapped the handcuff on my wrist.

"Quick!" he whispered, "or we'll have the whole house upon us!"

I hung back, clutching wildly at the newel post in an effort to break loose from him; but he numbed my grip with a sharp rap of his revolver across my knuckles. And as he drove me along the hall and through the dining-room, there came the creak of opening doors from above—the stir of feet, the anxious call of voices.

He dragged me madly across the lawn, and down

the winding path to the float where the others were impatiently awaiting us. Some one hauled me over the side of the boat, and propped me up against the bulwarks. I heard the low command to cast off, felt the first tentative throb of the powerful machinery. And, as we sped away from the shore, a rosy flush spread over the face of the waters, and in the east there glowed the clear, fresh promise of the dawn.

CHAPTER XVII

WHICH TREATS OF SYLVIA IN A NEW RÔLE

THAT long journey home to the island still rests in my memory as a horrible nightmare. Wherever I turned my eyes Dubois' pale face seemed to confront me; I could hear his last words ring over and over again in my ears. And, as my senses cleared, I began to understand the nature of the trick which had been played upon me. I was now irrevocably identified with criminals, branded as a criminal myself—as the murderer, perhaps, of one of my closest friends. The affair of the stolen bonds was as nothing compared to my present predicament. Anderson had spoken better than he knew when he had told me that they would find means of forcing me to join their band.

The success of the plot was clearly evidenced by the satisfied grins of the men as they passed me where I lay huddled up against the bulwark. But they respected my feelings sufficiently to leave me alone in my misery; and even when we had landed, they allowed me to slink off to the hut without appearing to notice that I had gone. I washed out the

cut on my head and rebandaged it; then, dead with fatigue, I crept into bed, and slept the clock twice around.

The next morning, as I wandered out on the veranda after a solitary breakfast, Pierre, waylaying me, thrust a newspaper into my hand.

"M'sieu' Hayward wish' me to give you zis," he said in reply to my questioning look.

"For what purpose?"

He shrugged. "If M'sieu' will read——"

I opened the paper.

"MORTON RENFREW TURNED PIRATE,"

I read in capitals three inches long.

RECOGNIZED LAST NIGHT
DURING DESPERATE RAID ON THE HOME
OF HENRY DUBOIS
AT WOOD'S HOLE.

MR. DUBOIS WOUNDED BY HIS OLD COLLEGE MATE."

'And then, in smaller type, the most important item of all:

"Mr. Dubois' Wound not Dangerous.
Doctors Hold out Strong Hopes of his Recovery."

I glanced through the lengthy columns devoted to the case, read over carefully a more extended ac-

count of Dubois' favorable condition, and gave the paper back to the Frenchman with a sarcastic smile.

"Thank Mr. Hayward for his kindness," I said.

"He certainly wastes no time in getting the newspaper reports of his crimes."

"We were ashore again las' night," the man explained, "to dispose of ze jewels."

"Were you successful?"

"We have ze money."

"Have you? I've not yet received my share."

Pierre's face brightened. "You will join us, M'sieu'? You will make yourself one wiz us?"

"Why, of course," I laughed. "Can't you see how eager I am at the idea?"

He caught the mocking tone in my voice, and frowned reprovingly.

"M'sieu' is not serious."

"I was never more serious in my life," I answered shortly, turning away.

And, indeed, I spoke only the truth, though not as I meant Pierre to understand it. My waking hours since our return to the island had brought me a clear realization of the state of affairs. I had reviewed the situation as well as I could, had foreseen its exigencies and requirements, and had determined to face them squarely. But when it had come to the point of decision between the only two courses left open, I found myself utterly unable to choose. If death had been suggested as an alternative, I

would have accepted it gladly. But I knew only too well that it was to Mr. Hayward's interest to keep me alive; and I shunned the thought of suicide as a cowardly act. In almost a literal sense I was between the devil and the deep sea.

This mood was still upon me when I turned away from Pierre; and it remained with me for the rest of that day. Mr. Hayward's anxiety that I should see the newspaper article had only made me more obstinate in my indecision. If, as his promptness to show me my position seemed to indicate, he was in immediate need of my services, I might be able to put him off with some vague promise; and, in the meanwhile, I could afford to temporize, waiting upon the course of events before declaring myself in any way.

But, as day after day slipped by, and no further attempt was made to force me to a conclusion, I began to wonder, and then to grow suspicious at the delay. Except for the fact that the men, when by themselves, spoke more openly of their experiences, the surface life of the place went on with its usual colorless monotony. I was still the well-fed guest, tolerated by the men, treated with unfailing kindness by Mr. Hayward. But in the light of what had passed, such good will seemed merely a clumsy subterfuge, a thin veil dropped over my eyes to conceal ulterior purposes.

But, if Mr. Hayward sought to win me by fair ap-

pearances, Dick stooped to no such underhand methods. Since our fracas on the boat he had thrown all restraint to the winds; and now seemed to take peculiar delight in trying to bring the quarrel to an open rupture. He taunted me to my face, insulted me behind my back—did everything, in fact, which should have provoked me to anger; then, finding me impervious to his attack, he began to utter threats against my life. I was disposed to treat the matter as of no consequence; but Pierre seemed to view it in a more serious light.

“He has try twice,” he said. “He may try eet again.”

“I don’t agree with you,” I protested; “not after Mr. Hayward’s last warning.”

“Bah! Zat would make not ze slightes’ diff’rence. M’sieu’ does not seem to un’erstan’ how he is enrage’.”

“I know that he hates me, but——”

“Eet is worse zan zat. He is desp’rate. You see. his suit wiz Ma’m selle is no more. She has—what you call eet—t’rown him over.”

“She has?” I said eagerly. “When did you learn of it?”

“To-day—yesterday—any time, p’rhaps.”

“Do you know how it happened?”

“I, M’sieu’?” He feigned a look of innocent surprise. “How should I?”

“She may have told you.”

His smile broadened. "I t'ink she tell you firs', M'sieu'," he said with a parting chuckle.

And tell me she did, in a way which set my head buzzing.

I had sought out a comfortable spot on the little beach beneath the hut, and was settling down to a quiet afternoon of reading, when a shadow flitted suddenly across the open pages of the book, and I raised my eyes to find Sylvia standing before me.

"Miss Hayward!" I exclaimed, scrambling hastily to my feet.

"I saw you come down the path," she said, as though in apology; "and followed you. Do you mind if I bother you for a moment?"

"Not in the least."

She drew a deep breath, as if she were about to speak, then turned half away from me, and gazed out across the sea. The tiny lines between her eyes grew into a frown; and she bit her lip nervously. She was visibly embarrassed. I waited in silence.

"I accused you once of theft," she began at last in a low, toneless voice. "I accused you of helping my mother to escape. I believed you did it for some wicked purpose of your own—that you even wished her to kill herself." She hesitated an instant. "I can't ask you to forgive me—such things are not to be forgiven. But I can tell you how miserably sorry I am that I should have listened to them—that I should have believed in them——"

"It was only natural that you should, Miss Hayward," I said, "under the circumstances——"

"Under the circumstances?" she flashed back in bitter contempt. "Do you know who told me?"

"I can imagine. But that doesn't change the case. You were bound to believe him. The facts were against me."

"But you denied them."

"The lowest criminal would do that. If you don't mind my saying so, I'm inclined to think you've taken the thing too much to heart. In fact, I'm the one to ask forgiveness—not you."

She faced me swiftly. "You? Why?"

"For the way I spoke about your father. I'm afraid we were both rather angry."

She accepted the remark with a little smile. "Yes," she admitted, "I'm afraid we were."

There was an awkward silence; the conversation seemed to have come to an abrupt halt. She stirred the loose sand at her feet for an instant with the toe of her shoe, then turned away with a half laugh.

"Good-by," she said.

And, at the sound of her voice, I spoke.

"A moment, please, Miss Hayward. I have something to tell you, too."

She paused. "Yes?"

It was my turn to be embarrassed. "Your father has intimated that he would—like us—you and me

—to marry,” I stammered. “I don’t know whether he has spoken to you about it——”

“He has,” she said quietly; “that is, he has hinted at it.”

“Well, I want you to know that I’ve had nothing to do with the scheme,” I went on, gathering confidence; “that I shall have nothing to do with it.”

“Oh!” she exclaimed in a startled tone; but I was now fairly launched upon my subject.

“He and Wadsworth have planned the whole thing out between them. They’ve approached me already—tried to force me into it, in fact. And from what I know of your father’s persistence I don’t think he intends to let up on me. But I’m prepared for him now, and when he comes at me again I believe I can hold my own against him. You will trust me to do my best, won’t you?”

“Certainly. I can imagine how distasteful it must be to you.”

“Distasteful? It’s infamous!”

She gave a queer little laugh. “You’re not very complimentary.”

I looked up at her quickly. “To your father?”

“No—to me.”

“I don’t understand,” I said, frankly puzzled. “I was thinking only of your happiness.”

“Of *my* happiness?”

“Yes. What else?”

“Oh!” she murmured. “I didn’t know.”

There was something in her voice which sent a wild idea surging through my brain.

"Miss Hayward!" I exclaimed. "Do you mean——"

"I mean that we can still be good friends," she broke in smilingly, holding out her hand.

But, as I reached to take it, a look of horror sprang into her eyes, and with a gasping cry she clutched me by the arm and flung me to one side.

As I staggered back a great rock crashed down upon the spot where I had stood.

CHAPTER XVIII

IN WHICH I JOIN THE BAND

CATCHING at a jutting spur of the rocky wall behind me, I drew myself slowly upright. Sylvia was gazing up fixedly at the headland above. There was an angry frown on her face; and her lips had closed tightly. I followed the direction of her glance in time to see Dick's tall figure draw back from the edge of the cliff.

"Your cousin chooses rather violent methods," I observed smilingly. "A bowlder of that size would wipe out half a regiment."

She gave a scornful laugh. "It looks more as though he were trying to kill two birds with one stone."

"Not you, surely?"

"Why not? Our relations are—well, a bit strained just at present."

"I know. But——"

"You do? Who told you?"

"Pierre."

Her features relaxed into a humorous smile. "The dear old busybody!" she murmured.

And then the truth flashed upon me. "He told you about me, too."

The reciprocal discovery, with its touch of the ludicrous, seemed to relieve the tension between us. Her smile broadened as she confirmed the assertion with a nod.

"You're so mysterious and secretive. He appears to be your only confidant."

"He's the only one who has offered himself," I began, then paused, as a new idea struck me. "Miss Hayward, do you mind if I ask whether you were actually engaged to Dick?"

The sudden turn of the conversation seemed to puzzle her. "Engaged? Yes—that is—there was an understanding between us."

"And it's all off?"

"Absolutely."

"Then he can have no possible interest in your mother's estate now."

Her look of bewilderment deepened. "I don't understand you. He never had any interest that I know of."

"No *present* interest," I corrected. "But, as your proposed husband, he might have hopes for the future."

Her eyes grew wide. "You don't think——"

"I think," I put in gently, "that I've found out how he expected to benefit by your mother's death."

For a breathless instant she stared before her, as

though she was gazing at some horror; then, as the meaning of my words sank into her brain, a dawning comprehension swept across her face.

"Oh, he couldn't! He *couldn't!*" she cried. "Are you sure you're not mistaken?"

"I *believe* I'm not," I declared firmly; "though there is only circumstantial proof."

"What is it?"

I told her.

"And you've spoken to no one?"

"No one but Pierre. I've been waiting for something more definite to turn up. It would look too much like a trumped-up charge with only the present evidence. And, besides, we're more apt to get at the bottom of the thing if Dick doesn't suspect."

"Yes," she admitted; "but, in the meantime, he may kill you."

"I can look out for myself," I returned confidently; "and your mother's safety is assured by your own act. If we can only work towards the same end, Miss Hayward——"

"We'll do more than that," she broke in quickly. "We'll work together." And this time, when she gave me her hand, friendship was taken as an acknowledged fact.

That night Wadsworth and Anderson were sent ashore to get the monthly supply of provisions; and the next morning I found the men deep in the dis-

cussion of a new expedition. From what I could gather it appeared that a rich New York banker was cruising up the coast with a party of friends on his steam yacht, and was expected to make Vineyard Sound within a day or two. The plan, as sketched out, was to lie in wait along the route, and hold up the vessel under cover of darkness; with full knowledge of her movements, it would be easy to choose a spot which she would pass after nightfall.

"As for the money," Anderson assured them, "there's plenty on board. Every man jack of 'em's a capitalist."

"And jewels, too," added Bailey. "Don't forget the ladies."

Altogether it gave promise of being the biggest thing which they had ever undertaken.

I slipped away, unnoticed in the general excitement, and stole up to the hut to think over the situation. The crisis which I had dreaded was upon me; the time had come when I must declare myself. If it had not been for Sylvia I would have defied them, told them to do their worst. Death seemed preferable to the life which they would force me to lead. But death would deprive the girl of my protection on the island; and I had still my name to clear. I was sick at heart at the prospect.

Pierre's dwarfish figure, appearing in the doorway a few moments later, seemed to be a visual proof of my fears.

"M'sieu' Hayward send me after you," he explained hesitatingly. "He wish to see you at once."

"About this new expedition?"

"I t'ink so." He looked at me intently. "Is M'sieu' ready to join?"

"No," I said. "I'm not ready to do anything."

"Ah!" He fumbled in his pocket, and drew out a crumpled slip of paper. "I cut zis out of yest-day's *Heral'*. No one else know eet's zere."

It was only a few lines, clipped evidently from the social column; but in an instant it changed the whole aspect of my affairs. I read it twice over before I could trust myself to speak.

"You've shown this to no one?" I insisted.

"To no one."

"And you'll promise to keep it quiet?"

"Most assuredly, M'sieu'. Indeed, I may help——"

But I had already crossed the threshold in search of Mr. Hayward, and did not wait to hear.

I found the old man seated before his desk in the living-room. He dropped his work as I entered, and looked up at me with a pleasant smile.

"Your promptness does you credit," he said genially. "I hope it means that you've seen the error of your ways. There's a little scheme afoot——"

"I've heard of it," I broke in; "and, if you wish my services——"

"You'll join us?" His brows lifted in gratified surprise.

I nodded. "On certain conditions."

"Name them."

"I must be allowed to go armed and masked, and under no surveillance of any kind. There must be no watch kept on my movements after we board the vessel; and, while on the vessel, I am to be under no one's orders, but must be entirely free to go where I like, and act as I see fit. On the other hand, I give you my solemn word that I shall do nothing which will in any way compromise you, or injure the success of your plan."

"Hm!" the old man grunted. "You're concise, to say the least. What's your object?"

"A private affair, entirely. Nothing that concerns you."

"Are you sure of that? With such strange conditions——"

"They are made necessary by circumstances. You can accept them or not, as you choose."

He considered for a moment, leaning back in his chair, and studying me with his shrewd eyes, as though he were trying to fathom my intentions. I returned his glance with cool indifference. A secretive smile crept up slowly from the corners of his mouth.

"I'll accept them," he said at last, nodding slightly. "We leave to-morrow night."

CHAPTER XIX

IN WHICH WE SET OUT

It was not until the next afternoon that I saw Sylvia again; and then only for a few moments. But what she had to report gave me food for thought for several days.

"Dick came to me last night," she said, "and apologized humbly for his actions. He says he was almost beside himself with anger, and hardly knew what he was doing."

"Then he *did* try to kill you?"

"He tried to kill both of us. He admits it frankly, but puts it down to his ungovernable temper. He seems to be very contrite."

"He has good cause to be," I grunted. "I hope he won't 'forget himself' again."

"I told him that, as far as I was concerned, I should never be able to trust him. He said he would make me. I showed him what a waste of time it would be, but he refused to see it in my light; so we let it rest at that." She looked up with a puzzled frown. "What do you think he means, Mr. Renfrew?"

"I think he means to wheedle you into reconsid-

ering your decision. He wants to get back on the old footing."

She sniffed disdainfully. "He knows it's too late for anything like that."

"Then perhaps he's playing some deeper game. At any rate, we must watch him carefully."

She smiled. "I kept mother's room well guarded last night." There was an instant's hesitation, in which she seemed to be pondering. "Is it true that you're going with father?"

"You know, then?"

"Yes—that is, he has given me his excuse."

"What was it?"

"Business."

"Business?" I repeated vaguely. "Ah, yes——"

But she cut me short. "Oh, I know what it means! I've been blind for years, but I've had my eyes opened at last. I've learned a great deal in these past few weeks which I never even suspected; and among other things, I've learned that 'business' covers a multitude of sins."

Her voice rang with bitter vehemence on the last word, as she paused as though waiting for me to speak. But I was not the one to discuss her father's actions with her; and yet I wondered what she knew, and how far her knowledge had led her to be lenient towards me.

"Do you think any the worse of me for going?"

She shook her head. "Another thing I've

learned is to judge no one, Mr. Renfrew." And now her voice had lost its harshness. "And you least of all."

It was long after ten when Mr. Hayward gave the order to cast off the lashings. We had worked up to the last moment, overhauling supplies, testing the engine, laying in ammunition; and, as the boat nosed her way out through the low opening of the cavern, I literally dropped in my tracks with fatigue. The night was blustery, but cloudless, with a fresh off-shore wind blowing in over the starboard quarter. Already little patches of foam had appeared on the crests of the long black rollers; and now and then, when the vessel lurched, a dash of phosphorescent spray would shoot up from the bow and sweep the foredeck with a sharp patter. But the starlit skies and the clean-cut line of the horizon were clear of storm.

I had crept under the shelter of the bulwarks, and was settling into a comfortable position, when I felt a light touch upon my shoulder. I looked up in astonishment to find Dick bending over me.

"I've been looking for you," he said quietly, squatting down by my side.

"But I thought you were to be left behind," I began.

"The old man *did* suggest something like that. But I managed to stow myself aboard when he

wasn't looking. And, as I didn't turn up till we had put to sea, he was forced to accept the inevitable. Fine weather isn't it?" And he surveyed the night with a leisurely glance.

"What do you want?" I demanded curtly.

He laughed. "Several things. I want to know, first, exactly what your position is in this present mix-up."

"What mix-up?"

"With Sylvia, of course. Oh! I heard all that high-flown nonsense about your never agreeing to her father's wishes. It sounded quite dramatic. But, frankly, Renfrew, I don't believe you."

"You've a right to your own opinion."

"Yes. But, you see, I want yours, too."

"I'm afraid I can't give it to you."

"Which means that you won't?" He thrust his face close to mine, and peered at me intently. "Or perhaps you're still undecided."

"I didn't know there was anything to decide."

"Pretty cock-sure about it, eh?" he grunted, dropping back into his place. "You've probably heard that Sylvia has broken off our engagement."

"She told me so herself."

"Hm! Don't let it raise your hopes too high. And don't let it make you forget that I'm still in existence."

"I'm not apt to forget," I retorted, "after yesterday——"

"Oh, that!" He shrugged. "It's too foolish even to mention. I've changed my tactics completely. But understand this, Renfrew; I've *not* changed in my feelings towards Sylvia. Whatever happens, I shall never give her up."

There was a hint of menace in his voice which foreshadowed trouble; and again I became conscious that his eyes were fixed upon me. But I was not disposed to provoke him to anger; and for a time we sat in dead silence, with the wind whistling in our ears, and the sea hissing and seething at our backs. It was a full moment before he spoke.

"What's your game to-night?"

"Game?" I repeated.

"Yes. Why did you suddenly decide to join the old man? You're not in this like the rest of us—I know that."

"Why not?"

"Because you're not our sort. What's your game?"

"My own business, entirely."

"Oh, indeed! And I suppose you think you can hog the profits entirely, too."

"Perhaps."

"Well, we don't do things like that on the island. We share in everything."

"Then this will be an exception. Your uncle——"

"I wasn't included in the expedition, so I'm not

included in his promises." He leaned towards me. "Look here, Renfrew. You'd better let me in on this. It might be safer."

"I'm not afraid."

"There are other means besides death," he threatened.

"And there are other ways of passing the time than in your company," I retorted.

"So you take that tone, do you?" He climbed slowly to his feet and scowled down at me. "Is that your final word?"

"Absolutely. I didn't ask you to meddle in my affairs."

"Take care, then, that I don't meddle in them," he growled, turning away.

I propped my arm against the bulwark, and stared out into the night. This new development was not to my liking. What I had to do on the yacht demanded secrecy; and with Dick trailing at my heels success would be reduced to a minimum. What had he said—that he was not included in his uncle's promise? Then he must know of my arrangement with Mr. Hayward—perhaps had been allowed to slip on board for the express purpose of following me. I was familiar enough with the old man's wiles to believe him capable of such casuistry. It was a neat way to have me shadowed and still live up to the letter of his contract. Whatever orders he might give, he knew that his nephew's jealousy and hatred

would make the fellow keep me within sight. My only chance seemed to lie in escaping Dick on the first set-off; if he found me later—well, I should be armed. He must look out for himself as best he could.

The light on Gay Head, throwing its wavering, intermittent path across the water, now shone over the starboard rail; and, as we swung into Vineyard Sound, the heavy thunder of breakers boomed suddenly in my ears. The long northern line of Martha's Vineyard, opening out over the quarter, glowed and shimmered in one continuous ring of surf. Here a sandy beach ran down into a phosphorescent smother of foam; there, where the rocks stood out more boldly, vivid patches of white leaped out of the darkness, and fell and leaped again; and, dominating it all with its crash and tumble, there rose the never-ending voice of the sea. Then, as we drew out across the Sound, the noises died away, the ghost-shapes vanished; and of the tumult only the merry chatter of the water under our forefoot remained. So quickly had it come, so quickly passed, that it seemed like the momentary vision of a dream.

We had changed our course, and were heading in a northeasterly direction towards the pin-prick of light on the horizon which marked Tarpaulin Cove. The supposed line of route which the yacht would follow had been reached. Bailey, appearing from

the hatchway, crept forward to his old post of look-out. Mr. Hayward and Anderson, each armed with a glass, patrolled the stern. A sense of restrained excitement seemed suddenly to pervade the vessel. I shook myself out of a half doze, and, brushing the sleep from my eyes, scrambled to my feet.

The shore line behind us had faded from view. Over the port bow the red and green lights of a coasting schooner bobbed and danced in the middle distance; and beyond I could dimly make out the black hull of a steamer, going westward; but, except for these, the Sound was free of boats.

We held on, well under the lee of the mainland, then, turning, ran eastward until the light on Nobska Point was abeam. It was now about two in the morning.

"No go," Mr. Hayward muttered. "Swing her back, Wadsworth."

And the vessel, responding quickly to her rudder, swept about in a wide circle, and began to retrace her course.

We left Nobska Point far behind us, passed the flare at Tarpaulin Cove, skirted the Lucas Shoals, and, off Nashawena Island, again overhauled the working schooner. Her helmsman bawled at us as we brushed by. But we kept on silently, pushing out into the open sea, until the broad gleam of Gay Head reappeared to port.

Then, as we turned once more, there came a subtle

change over the night. A vague yellow glow seemed to well up out of the velvety blackness of the water; a touch of color ran along the eastern horizon; and the opaque darkness was suddenly broken into a myriad particles of light. The wind, dropping perceptibly, drifted in over the quarter, laden with the fresh earthy smell of the dawn.

Mr. Hayward lowered his glasses with a peevish gesture. "It's all up for to-night. She has either been delayed, or we've missed her. Put in at Casey's," he called to Wadsworth. "We'll see what he has to say."

The boat, veering south, headed for the dim coastline of Martha's Vineyard; and, as we went, the eastern heavens seemed to become alive with flame. A pink flush glowed in the trail of saffron which streaked the lower horizon; and behind and above it long rosy fingers of light reached into the blue.

Bit by bit, as the dawn colors deepened, the cloak of mist dropped away from the shores which we were approaching; and beach and headland grew into bold relief. Gray points of rock dipped into the golden waters; a little tidal river sparkled and gurgled over its shallows; and, as we swept towards land, a flock of gulls, rising before us, wheeled in a flash of dazzling white across the sky. Then a tiny cove, with a weather-beaten cottage set upon the green slopes behind it, enfolded us in its embrace; and in the sudden silence, while we floated up to the

rough pierhead, the morning broke in a flood of sunlight upon the world.

Mr. Hayward's voice struck a jarring note in the quiet beauty of the scene.

"Make her fast, Bailey. We'll probably spend the day here. I'll be back in a few minutes." And clambering up the rude ladder of the pierhead, he strode along the loose planking to the shore.

We watched him climb the ill-kept path beyond, and halt before the cottage. There was an instant's pause; then the door opened, and the frowsy head of a woman appeared. Mr. Hayward said a few words to her. She smiled a toothless smile in answer. The door opened wider; and the old man stepped within.

"Whose house is that?" I asked Anderson, who was standing beside me.

"Casey's."

"I know, but——"

"Well, that's all you're goin' to know," he cut in sharply, swinging on his heel.

But his words only served to pique my curiosity. I turned to Pierre, who had just emerged from the hatchway.

"Who's Casey?"

"Casey, M'sieu'? A frien' of M'sieu' Hayward's."

"What sort of friend?"

"A—a bus'ness frien'—p'rhaps."

"Ah, I see! A dealer in jewelry—and other knick-knacks?"

Pierre shrugged. "Breakfas' is ready," he called to the men, as though my question needed no reply.

But I had discovered one thing which had long puzzled me: the channel through which Mr. Hayward disposed of his takings. And, as I followed the others down into the cabin, I wondered at my stupidity in not thinking of some such arrangement before.

A savory dish of bacon and eggs stood invitingly upon the table; and the pungent odor of fresh coffee hung heavily in the air. We ate with the voracious appetites of men who had fasted since sundown, while the Frenchman, hovering over a little oil-stove in one corner, kept our plates supplied. But in spite of hunger, I was conscious of a sense of anxious attention amongst the men; and now and then, when there came a lull in the clatter of dishes, some one would raise his head and listen intently, as though for approaching footsteps. But it was not until the meal was almost over that the old man returned.

"It's all right, boys," he cried cheerily, still half-way down the ladder. "Something went wrong with the yacht's machinery, and she put into New Bedford for repairs. She's due to leave at ten to-night, so we have an easy day before us. Casey's keeping guard." He looked over at me. "You'd

better get your beauty sleep while you can, Mr. Renfrew."

"I think I could sleep till Doomsday," I yawned.

He laughed. "I'll see that you're waked before that."

There were a few moments of desultory conversation. Then, one by one, we turned into the narrow bunks which lined the cabin, leaving Mr. Hayward to finish his breakfast alone.

CHAPTER XX

THE YACHT—

THE smoky little lamp over the table was lighted when Pierre's hand on my shoulder woke me; and, as I scrambled out of the berth, the whirring throb of the engine warned me that we were on the move again.

"Good Heavens!" I cried. "What time is it?"

"After ten, M'sieu'. Ze ozzers haf eat. But I haf save' you some."

He pointed to the remains of a meal, still left on the table. I drew up a stool, and helped myself plentifully. The boat gave a premonitory lurch.

"Are we in the Sound yet?"

"Jus' getting zere—I t'ink."

I looked cautiously about the cabin, rising in my seat to peer into each unoccupied bunk.

"Where are they all?"

"On deck, M'sieu'."

"Who's in the engine-room?"

"Deeck."

I beckoned to him to come nearer. "Has he been told off to board the yacht?"

“I don’t know. M’sieu’ Hayward haf put him in charge of ze machinery.”

“Are you going?”

He shook his head. “Some one mus’ take care of ze boat.”

I looked up at him. “Do you think you can keep him from coming along with us?”

“Ze whole time, M’sieu’? You may be hours——”

“No; only for the first few moments. If you can bottle him up down here until we get on board it will be enough. He has threatened to follow me; and I’m afraid he suspects.”

“Ah, I see! He would spoil your plan. Indeed, M’sieu’, I will do my bes’.”

“Thank you, Pierre,” I said, giving his hand a warm shake.

“Eet’s nozzing, M’sieu’. I wish you ev’ry success.”

I finished my supper hastily, pocketed the mask and the brace of loaded revolvers, which the Frenchman produced as my allotted armament, and hurried on deck.

It was a night of absolute calm. The air, stirred into movement by our passage, was humid and lifeless. Black oily billows, rising beneath the glassy surface of the sea, ran under the boat, clung to her keel for an instant, then, lifting lazily, drifted into the darkness without a sound. Already Gay Head

light shone dully through a veil of mist; and along the western horizon, where the stars were dimmest, I imagined the vague outlines of clouds. It was the sort of weather which breeds a storm.

Anderson turned from his place amidships, and came towards me.

"Any sign of her yet?" I asked.

"I don't know. There's a vessel to north'ard, just roundin' Cuttyhunk. The yacht'll beat down the Bay that way from New Bedford. Ah, I thought so!" The engine gave a last pulsating throb or two, then stopped entirely. "The old man's decided to lay to."

The boat, shooting on for a few yards further, dipped gently into the trough of the sea, and began to wallow on the long slow swells. A moment later the twin side lights of the distant vessel bobbed into view as she cleared the island, and swung into the Sound. Mr Hayward appeared from the fore-deck.

"Where are the lamps?" he asked Anderson.

"Under the bulwarks, already lighted."

"You'd better show them then. There's no use in making the yacht suspicious."

Anderson went forward to sling our own lights over the side.

"We've got her this time," said the old man gleefully. "She left a bit earlier than I expected——"

"Are you sure she's the one?"

“No. But she’s worth investigating. I’m not the kind to miss a chance.”

I made no answer; and for some time we stood together, watching the twinkling lights of the vessel grow nearer out of the night. She was overhauling us rapidly. The red and green of her lamps brightened and glowed like the great eyes of some huge cat against the wall of darkness. Then, gradually, the slim white hull emerged from the gloom; and a moment later the air vibrated with the distant throb of her engine. Mr. Hayward examined her anxiously through his glasses.

“She’s the one,” he declared. “I’d know those lines in a hundred. Are you ready forward?”

“All ready,” came Bailey’s voice in answer.

The yacht was now some five hundred yards away, and still bearing down upon us. The bare masts, and the funnel with a black smudge of smoke floating from it, were plainly visible. I could even make out the dim form of the helmsman on the bridge. There was an instant of tense silence while she drew in swiftly. Then, as she veered to port, Mr. Hayward raised his hand.

“Now!” he commanded. And Bailey, standing up, waved a lantern in our bow.

A gong sounded aboard the yacht; and her engines stopped abruptly. A bell rang; and a long streak of foam ran out from her stern, as the screw was reversed. A sailor’s head appeared over the side.

"Boat ahoy!" he shouted. "What's the matter?"

"Is that the yacht *Iona*?"

"Yes. What do you want?"

"I've got a telegram for Captain Caldwell."

"Where from?"

"I don't know. It was sent to Wood's Hole with orders to get it to him as soon as possible. We've cruised the whole way down the Sound. Shall we come aboard?"

"Of course. Just drop aft a bit, and I'll throw you a ladder."

Mr. Hayward gave a low order to Wadsworth; and our boat, gathering a little way on her, ran for the yacht's quarter. I caught a momentary glimpse of the helmsman looking down at us over the bridge railing. Then we slipped in under the shadow of the hull; and he was lost to view.

Bailey, catching the rope ladder, made the boat fast to it; and we swung around gently, rubbing against the yacht's side.

"Come!" whispered the old man, scrambling up the ladder.

Wadsworth, Bailey, and Anderson followed him in quick succession. I brought up the rear. The sailor scowled as one by one we crawled in under the canvas awning which covered the deck.

"Look a-here," he protested. "I didn't bargain

f'r the whole shipload. If it takes all o' you to deliver a telegram——”

“Where's the captain?” broke in Mr. Hayward.

“Down below—a-bed. I'll call him.”

“Never mind now. Who's that on the bridge?”

“Th' second mate.”

“Any one else on deck?”

“Only me an' two others—th' night watch.” A gleam of suspicion shot into the man's eyes. “'Pears to me you're mighty cur'us. You jus' give me that telegram, an'—— By Gorry! What's that?”

He turned and stared down at the motor boat beneath us. A subdued noise of scuffling had swept up suddenly from the open hatchway.

“It's Dick, the damned fool!” I heard Wadsworth mutter.

“Dick,” repeated Mr. Hayward. “Didn't he come——”

But Wadsworth raised his hand for silence. And, as the sailor swung back with a questioning look, Bailey and Anderson, pouncing on the man, pinioned his arms behind him, and, before he could make an outcry, had him lying gagged and bound against the house. There was a sound of movement from the foredeck.

“Quick, boys!” the old man whispered. “We must get the jump on them!”

The men scattered silently, Wadsworth and Bailey

running forward towards the bridge and the fore-castle, Anderson diving into the companionway which led to the engine-room. The old man glanced inquiringly at me.

"I'll wait till you go," I said shortly.

He frowned. "You're afraid I won't keep to my promise?"

"Exactly."

"Hm!" He hesitated, as though he would speak, then thought better of it. "I'll follow the others," he decided, and with a little nod, strode off up the deck.

I turned towards the owner's quarters. The news of the hold-up had not yet penetrated to this part of the yacht. The stern, with its array of easy-chairs and cushions, lay silent and deserted. There was no one to oppose my progress as I plunged into the darkness of the after deckhouse, and picked my way cautiously down the stairs to the saloon below.

Here, by the aid of a solitary electric light, I paused long enough to put on my mask, and take an account of my bearings. Then, choosing a passage, cut in the port side of the forward bulk-head, I crept in what I conceived to be the direction of the galley. The faint greasy odor of stale cooking assailed my nostrils as I advanced; and an instant later I ran full tilt into a closed door.

Pushing it open, I struck a match, and stumbled into the pantry. The walls were lined with well-

stocked shelves of silver and china; but in one corner the white expanse of another door gleamed dully in the flickering light. A brass plate upon it bore the legend: "Steward." I knocked.

A sleepy voice answered. I drew my revolver, and, with my shoulder against the panel, forced the door open. In the dim light from the port-hole, I could make out the vague form of a man leaning out of the berth.

"Who are you?" he demanded. "What's the matter?"

I thrust the revolver into his face. "I want to ask you a few questions," I said.

It required but a moment or so to get the information I wanted. But before I left I took the precaution of binding the man's arms and legs with one of his own sheets. Then, locking the door behind me, I slipped the key into my pocket.

As I re-entered the saloon there came the report of a shot forward; and a soft patter of footsteps ran along the deck overhead. I switched off the electric light, and groped my way into the starboard passage, where the steward had told me that the yacht's guests were quartered. The footsteps, halting an instant in the deckhouse, began to descend the saloon stairs.

Low excited voices sounded in the staterooms as I passed them; and once a door swung outwards into my very face. I banged it shut; and, from the fem-

inine exclamations of fright which rose behind it, I judged that the ladies would not venture forth again that night. At the last doorway I paused and knocked.

“Who’s there?” cried a man’s voice.

I pounded louder. There was a second’s hesitation; then the door fell open. I pushed through the aperture.

“What the devil——”

But I had already shot the bolt behind me, and was turning on the light. The man surveyed me with a scowling glance.

“This is a nice piece of business! Who are you, anyway?”

I removed my mask.

“Renfrew!” he gasped.

“Well, Prescott!” I said.

CHAPTER XXI

—AND WHAT I FOUND ON BOARD

My late partner, crouching against the side of his berth, stared at me a full moment with startled eyes. I returned his gaze smilingly, taking no care to conceal the triumph which I felt. Whether he read the purpose in my face, or whether his own intuition told him what to expect, it was evident that my sudden appearance had put his senses to rout; he was fairly beside himself with fright. It was I who spoke first.

"You don't seem very glad to see me."

"Oh, yes—of course—I——" He straightened up awkwardly, still clutching to the bunk for support. "How did you know I was aboard?"

"I read it in a clipping from the *Herald*."

"Ah! But where on earth did you drop from, Mort?"

"The skies, perhaps."

He essayed a laugh. "With that rag on your face, and those lethal weapons in your fists?"

"They're the insignia of my new calling."

"Then it's true what the papers said? You've joined a band of pirates?"

"Yes. I felt the need of a change of partners. Honesty's only comparative, after all."

He looked as though he would have given vent to his anger had he dared. As it was, he smiled. "Are you speaking of yourself?" he asked sweetly.

"You know well enough of whom I'm speaking. Who accused me of stealing those bonds?"

"Not I, Mort," he protested earnestly. "I wouldn't believe it, even after they showed me the evidence. I told them I'd stake my honor you were on the square. The papers commented fully on my attitude. If you'd only seen them——"

"I have," I broke in succinctly.

"Then you must realize how badly I felt. Good Lord! If the trustee had those bonds now, the firm could pay all its debts, and still have a nice little nest egg left over. They've gone up twenty points in the last three weeks."

"Then why don't you produce them?"

"I—produce them?"

"Yes—you damned hypocritical thief."

His face turned livid. "Look here, Mort," he blustered, starting towards me. "You're going pretty far——"

"I'm going much further before I'm through." I leveled a revolver at him. "Sit down!"

He stared at the pistol for an instant, then sank back on the berth. The sight of the firearm had sobered him.

“Now,” I continued, “we’ll just talk this matter over quietly. If you do what I want I’ll spare your miserable carcass. If you don’t—God help your soul!”

I drew up a chair against the doorway, and seated myself with the revolver laid across my knee. In the momentary silence which followed there came a sound of shrieks and angry imprecations from the adjoining staterooms. The looting of the ship had begun.

Prescott’s face went a shade whiter as he listened to the tell-tale noises. I watched him with a mocking smile.

“What do you want?” he asked finally in a hoarse voice.

“I want the bonds.”

“I haven’t got them.”

“Where are they?”

He hesitated. “On shore—in New York.”

“Whereabouts?”

“I can’t tell you.”

“Don’t you know?”

“Yes, but—oh, hang it, Mort! You’re asking too much of me. After all the worry and trouble I’ve had over them I can’t let them slip out of my hands like this.”

I raised the revolver. “Where are they?” I repeated.

“Will you give me half if I tell you?”

"I'll give you your life, and nothing more. Come, be quick!" I insisted. "I can't wait here all night."

Again he hesitated. "They're in the Trust Company."

"The Columbian?"

"Yes. In my private box."

I produced paper and pencil. "Write me an order for them."

He glanced at me with a strange look of surprise. "Is that what you want?"

"What more should I want?" I demanded.

"Oh, nothing—nothing, of course." He scribbled the order hastily, with his head bent as though to conceal his face.

A vague suspicion flitted through my mind.

"I wish you success with them," he went on, handing back the paper. "They've been nothing but a bother from the first."

I read over what he had written, then, thrusting the order into my pocket, motioned towards the door.

"Now you come with me."

"Come? Where?"

"Back to the island. You didn't think I'd let you slip through my fingers like that, did you?"

"But, Mort——"

"Get your clothes on at once."

He flung me an evil glance, but obeyed without



a word. I sat watching him in quiet amusement.

The low, hysterical sobbing of a woman sounded from somewhere near-by; and now and then another woman's voice spoke soothingly, as though in answer. But the louder noises of plundering had retreated down the passage toward the saloon.

Prescott, throwing on his coat, reached under the berth, and drew out a satchel.

"Here! Leave that!" I said angrily. "You can't take any baggage."

"I must have a change of clothes," he protested.

"You don't need them where you're going."

"But my belongings—my jewelry——"

"Are much safer here."

A heavy frown creased his brow; and his mouth shut tightly. "Well, I'm not going without them," he muttered. "So you can do what you damned please." And he plumped himself down on the bunk with an obstinate air.

A thrill of elation ran through me.

"All right," I conceded quietly. "We'll compromise. Just hand the bag over to me."

"What for?"

"So that I can choose what's necessary. We'll do them up in a bundle."

He shook his head. "No, you don't. If there's any choosing to be done, I'll do it myself."

"Good," I agreed. "Put the bag on the chair, here—under the light."

He seemed disposed to demur again; but I brought the revolver to bear on him. He lifted the valise to the chair with an ill grace.

"I suppose I can choose what I want?"

"Certainly. But you must take each thing out separately. I can't have any concealed weapons, you know."

He began to haul out his wardrobe, piece by piece. I scrutinized each article carefully, as he deposited it on the floor. The pile had grown into quite a respectable size before he finally paused.

"Is that all?" I asked.

"Yes."

"Are you sure?"

I leaned forward to examine the bag; but he closed it quickly.

"There are only a few odds and ends. I can stow them away in my pockets."

"Let's have a look at them first."

He unfastened the catch with a disdainful grunt, and, thrusting his hands into the valise, drew out a miscellaneous lot of handkerchiefs and ties.

"That's all," he said, turning suddenly from me, and bending over the bag as though to replace the things.

But I had found what I was looking for.

"Stop!" I cried, reaching out an eager arm.

And, as he paused, I jerked a packet of papers from the truck in his hands. They were the bonds!

"Yes; that's all," I mocked him, slipping them into an inside pocket.

He turned on me fiercely, his face purple with baffled rage. "Give them back!" he snarled, driving his claw-like fingers at my throat.

I ducked beneath his guard and, catching him about the waist, flung him to the ground. He stared up at me out of evil eyes.

There came a thundering knock at the door.

"What ho, my hearties! You're kickin' up too much noise in there. What'cher playin'—ten pins?"

It was Dick! He had traced me. What was I to do? I looked down at the man still grovelling at my feet. A strange ashy paleness had swept over his face; and his eyes were alive with a new emotion—fear.

"Who's that?" he whispered hoarsely.

"A friend of mine."

"A friend——"

But I motioned to him to keep silent. His words had suggested an idea.

"Goin' t' let me in?" Dick demanded. "I'll give yeh jus' three seconds, an' then——" The door sagged under the sudden impact of his weight.

I turned to Prescott. "Get up!" I commanded.

"And remember your name's Brown—Joseph Brown."

"But if he should——" He hesitated.

"Should what?"

"Oh, nothing—nothing! It's worth trying at any rate."

I glanced at him with interest. Since Dick's appearance on the scene his manner had changed completely. He was plainly frightened; and even now, while we stood waiting, he started at each crashing blow, as though it had been aimed at him.

I was still endeavoring to account for his strange behavior when the bolt gave way with a dismal groan, and Dick, kicking the door open, lurched in. His rolling gait and the half-emptied champagne bottle clutched in his hand, showed only too plainly that he had been drinking. I shoved Prescott behind me.

"Well, here I am, ol' sport—'cordin' t' promise. Sorry I was un'void'bly detained." Dick raised the bottle to his lips. "Here's t' a shor' life, an' a merry death—an' a quick one." He drained the wine to its last drop, and flung the bottle into a corner. "Nectar 'f th' gods, Renfrew. Too bad I haven' any t' offer you an' your frien'—or isn't there any frien'? Be hanged if I——" His eyes, slipping past me, fixed themselves suddenly upon Prescott, who was peering over my shoulder. "By Heaven! It's Ballard!"

CHAPTER XXII

BALLARD . . . OR PRESCOTT?

"BALLARD?" I repeated in astonishment.

But Dick turned on me with an ugly look. "Wha'cher doin' wuth that low-lived beast? Wha' sor' 'f a deal 've you two go' t'gether?"

"What sort of a deal have you got with him yourself?"

He laughed harshly. "Tha's goo'—tha's damn' goo', Renfrew. Why, he an' I 're ol' pals. Here, stan' 'side, 'n' le' me have a loo' at him."

He elbowed me out of the way. Prescott, exposed to view, nodded sheepishly.

"Hello, Hayward."

"Hello, yourself," returned Dick. "Guess you didn' know I'd pay you a visit when you shipped on this ol' wine tub, did you? Don'cher feel kind'er remorseful?"

Prescott moistened his lips to reply; but Dick commanded silence with a threatening gesture.

"You talked enough out wes' when you got me t' take over that minin' stock you'd floated. Guess it's my turn t' talk now. A nice sort o' chap you are—tellin' me th' comp'ny was gilt-edged when you knew it was ready t' go up in smoke."

"I didn't know it; those were only rumors——"

"Yes—an' you tol' me they were false—an' I b'lieved you. Who wouldn'? You held half th' stock o' th' concern."

"Well, didn't that show my confidence?"

"Yes, an' got mine, too—till I foun' out it was your stock that'd been dumped on me."

Prescott stirred uneasily. "It wasn't," he denied. "It belonged to that man Davis."

"It was in his name on th' books," Dick admitted; "but it was really yours, an' you'd only had it transferred t' put me off th' track. Oh, I learned all about it, later. Davis confessed—after you'd skipped out East."

I was listening with interest. Prescott had told me of his youthful ventures in the West, and their dismal failure. But they had been the experiences of his early days—years before I had known him, and I had never heard the slightest hint of dishonesty connected with them. Indeed, he had given me to understand that he had been the victim of swindlers himself.

Dick glowered at Prescott, then turned to me, his flushed face twitching with anger. "Wha'd you think 'f a fellow like that, Renfrew? Ge's me int' a minin' scheme, then, when he fin's it's goin' t' bust, he grabs all th' profits, unloads his shares on me at par, an' slips off. Jus' loo' at him!" He pointed to the cringing Prescott with drunken scorn.

"There isn' a grain o' truth in him. He's false fr'm top t' toe. Even his name—By th' way, wha' did he tell you his name was?"

"Ballard," I hazarded.

"Tha's wha' he tol' me. Bu' it's no' right. I foun' it out after he'd gone. He's go' another—his real one. Now, wha' th' devil is it?"

"He might have a thousand," I put in hurriedly; "and it wouldn't make the slightest difference——"

"Bu' it does," insisted Dick; "'cause it's like tha' bally par'ner's o' yours. I r'member thinkin' 'f it a' th' time. By Heaven, Renfrew! If he's th' same man——"

"He isn't," I interrupted. "So you needn't worry."

"Lucky f'r you he isn't," growled Dick, facing his victim again.

A cunning light was shining in Prescott's eyes. "Look here, Hayward," he said rapidly; "if I show you where you can get \$50,000 worth of bonds, will you——"

But I was on him before he could finish, throttling the words in his throat.

"Get out of this," I whispered, "or I'll shoot you." And I pushed him unceremoniously towards the door.

There was a howl of rage behind me; and, as I turned, a stream of fire spat past my face. Prescott dropped in a crumpled heap to the floor. I

knelt beside him and felt his heart. He was dead.

"You fool!" I cried, looking over at Dick, swaying unsteadily in the middle of the stateroom. "You've killed him."

"Goo' 'nough," he muttered. "Bu' I would 've liked t' know wha' he had t' say."

The man's callousness disgusted me. "Why didn't you think of that before you shot?" I retorted. "Come. We'd better make tracks at once."

He followed me obediently across the threshold and down the passage, chuckling vacantly to himself as he stumbled at my heels. Mr. Hayward and Anderson met us in the saloon.

"So there you are!" the old man cried, striding up to us and shaking his fist in Dick's face. "I've got a long account to settle with you, young man."

Dick clapped him on the back. "Se'le away, ol' buck," he laughed amiably.

Mr. Hayward seized him by the arm. "I will, never fear—in good time. Here, Anderson, get a grip on him." And between them the two men carried the protesting Dick towards the after stairs.

I turned into the port passage, and made my way to the steward's room. The man gave a sigh of relief as I turned on the light.

"I thought you'd forgotten me, sir. It wasn't like you used to treat us aboard the *Naravido*."

I looked down at him in surprise. "You know me?"

"Well, rather. I'm Manson, sir. Don't you remember, I shipped with you in 1905?"

"So you did," I exclaimed, peering into his face. "If you had told me in the beginning——"

"I wasn't sure, sir—what with the darkness, and that mask on your face."

I smiled as I unbound him. "Quite a come down, isn't it?"

"Yes, sir. But I can't believe you're in with that rough lot. There's something queer about it, sir——"

"There is," I broke in, touched by his sincerity. "And you can make it right, if you wish." I drew out a pencil and a sheet of closely written paper, and, sitting on the edge of the bunk, scribbled a few lines at the bottom. "Will you help me out?"

"I'll do anything you ask."

"Then get this into the hands of the police at the first place where the yacht stops. Don't let any one know that you have it, or even that you've seen me; and warn the police to keep absolutely quiet."

"But why don't you escape now, sir. I can hide you——"

"It would be useless. They'd search the boat till they found me. Besides, there's some one on the island who is dependent on me—some one whom

I can't leave." I handed him the paper. "I've no way of repaying you now; but, if I ever get on shore again——"

"Don't mention it, sir. I'm not that kind."

I left him with the feeling that I had one friend to stand up for me in case of need.

An ominous silence reigned in the deserted saloon, broken only by the muffled outcries of the yacht's guests, imprisoned in their staterooms. I crossed the floor rapidly, and ascended the stairs. At the top Bailey almost tumbled over me.

"I've been all over the ship after you," he panted. "The old man's putting off."

We raced up the deck and down the rope ladder to the motor boat, as she swung away from the yacht's side.

CHAPTER XXIII

THE CRAZY WOMAN AGAIN

THERE was a deep thrill of elation in my heart as I stood on the stern of the motor boat, and watched the yacht fade into the darkness. The night's adventures had succeeded beyond my fondest dreams. I had not only captured the bonds, but, in Manson, had found a safe means of communication with the mainland. His word, if believed, would carry weight with the police, and, backed by the written statement which I had given him, might go far towards establishing my innocence.

Blinded by the roseate vistas which glowed before me, I lost sight of Dick, and his blundering interference in my affairs. But I was soon to have my eyes rudely opened, and by no other person than Dick himself.

We had cleared Gay Head, and were heading due south towards the island, when I first became conscious of angry voices in the cabin. The hatchway was closed; but I heard enough to make me suspect that it was Dick and Mr. Hayward, quarrel-

ing. I went over to where Bailey lay sprawled against the starboard bulwark.

"What's the row about?"

"Don't know—'less it's the old man takin' it out o' his nephew."

"What has he done?"

"What *hasn't* he done? Everythin' t' spoil our chances. Hunts up the owner o' the yacht in his stateroom forrad, an' shoots him dead before we can find out where the valuables are. Then wakes up the whole ship tryin' t' break into the liquor chest. An' finally gets so bloomin' tight he don't know what he's doin'. We didn't pinch enough to keep a puppy alive f'r a week." The man's face was sullen; and there was a peevish grumble in his voice. It was evident that, from his point of view, the expedition had not been a success.

The noise of the discussion below decks continued for a few moments longer; then the hatchway rasped open, and Mr. Hayward's head appeared through the aperture.

"Mr. Renfrew?"

"Yes?"

"Will you step down into the cabin for a second?"

"Certainly!" But, though I answered with alacrity, my mind was possessed by a sudden fear.

The old man, with his arms crossed, stood be-

side the table, frowning. Dick, sober now, and very white, cowered on a stool in one corner. I halted at the bottom of the ladder and looked inquiringly from one to the other. Mr. Hayward drew a long breath and spoke.

"My nephew, Mr. Renfrew, has been guilty of insubordination. He has not only acted against my orders, but has——"

"I know," I interrupted. "Bailey has just told me."

"Ah! So much the better. We can come at once to the business in point." He lifted a hand to his face and stroked his chin slowly. "When I agreed that you should not be followed or hindered on board the yacht, I meant it. But Dick saw fit to consider that the promise did not bind him. What he did was against my express wishes."

"Was it?" I demanded with sarcastic emphasis.

He glanced at me sharply. "Of course," he returned evenly. "But I want you also to understand this: Our agreement extended only while we were on board the *Iona*. I am at liberty now to reap the benefit of what he has done."

He paused, as though to note the effect of his words. I strove to return his glance with indifference; but I was conscious of an involuntary twitching at the corners of my mouth.

"Dick tells me," he went on with a smile, "that he found you with a man whom he had once known

by the name of Ballard, but whom he now believes to be your late partner."

"He has no proof——"

"Pardon me—he has." Mr. Hayward held out an envelope addressed to Prescott. "He picked this up in your friend's stateroom; it was lying on a heap of clothes."

I started at the accusing bit of paper in helpless silence.

"If further evidence is needed," the old man continued, "it is supplied by your own action. Why should you hustle the man out of the room when he tried to tell Dick about some bonds? And why should those bonds amount to the exact sum of \$50,000?" He was openly triumphant now. "I'm beginning to believe that your partner really did steal the securities, Mr. Renfrew; and that you hunted him up for the purpose of finding out where he kept them."

"And if I did?" I returned.

"It would be wiser to let me into the secret."

I began to see a way out of the difficulty. "Does your old offer that we divide the profits still hold?"

"Certainly."

"Hm!" I appeared to consider. "Well, he told me they were in his private box in the Columbian Trust Company."

"In New York?"

"Yes. I made him give me an order for them."

I handed the old man the slip of paper. His eyes glistened as he glanced through it.

"My boy!" he cried. "We've got them at last! This is a haul worth making. Why didn't you tell me sooner?"

"I wanted to be sure of my share first."

He laughed. "You don't mind my keeping the order, I suppose?"

"Not at all."

"Good." He slapped me genially on the back. "And, as for our agreement, I'll pay you up to the last penny."

We landed in the early dawn; and my first task was to hide the bonds in a dark corner beneath the flooring of the hut.

The net result of this interview was to put me on a new and more intimate footing with Mr. Hayward. I was asked for suggestions as to the better management of the island, consulted about the proposed details of future expeditions—treated in every respect as a trusted member of the household. I accepted the position as I found it, ashamed of myself at the hypocritical part which I was forced to play, but determined, nevertheless, to rebel against any actual participation in his schemes of robbery. I was further reconciled to the situation by the more frequent opportunities which I had for being with Sylvia.

The girl seemed to be in no way averse to my companionship; and in our long rambles over the island I came to know the sweetness and strength of her nature, the unsullied depths of her soul. If no word of love was spoken, it was because each day was sufficient unto itself, and I was afraid to shatter the gossamer beauty of what might still be only a dream. I had so much to ask, so little to give.

Moreover, there was Dick to be dealt with; and, though he could offer no possible objection to our growing intimacy, his sullen face and scowling glances spoke only too eloquently of the baffled fury which raged within him. On several occasions I discovered him following us, and once I even caught him creeping up behind a rock on which we were sitting. But as he showed no violence I let the matter pass, laughing at Sylvia and what I termed her imaginary fears.

Indeed, I had some reason for my sense of security; for Pierre, in recounting the details of the quarrel on the boat, had given me an inkling of Dick's true position with his uncle.

"You know, M'sieu', ze ol' man let Deeck come on ze boat so he could watch you?"

I nodded.

"Well, when he foun' Deeck had not done eet he was so mad I t'ought he would kill him. He was for sending Deeck off ze islan' at once. Zen Deeck,

he tell about ze bon's; an' you come down an' show he speak ze trut'. An' M'sieu' Hayward, he so glad, he tell Deeck he gif him one more chance. But if he do anyzing—ze ver' smalles'—agains' ze ol' man's wish, off he go from ze islan'—Pouf!—like zat." A gleam of humor shot into the Frenchman's eyes, "I got ze devil for holdin' him in ze cabin."

"So Dick is practically on probation?"

"Yes, M'sieu'. Ze ol' man watch him like a hawk."

But, as events proved, my assurance was unwarranted; and, in spite of his watchfulness, Mr. Hayward could not avert the tragedy which was about to take place.

It was verging on eleven o'clock of a sultry July night, and I was beginning to think of bed, when Pierre, panting for breath, stumbled across the threshold of the hut. His white face and bulging eyes warned me that something was wrong.

"What's the matter?" I demanded anxiously.

"Eet's M'sieu' Hayward an' Deeck. Zey've quarrel' again—about you an' Ma'mselle."

"When?"

"An hour ago. Deeck deman' zat M'sieu' Hayward gif her to him. An' when ze ol' man refuse, he draw a pistol an' try to shoot him. Ze ol' man call, an' we all run in an' hol' Deeck. Zen ze ol'

man ordaire him to leave ze islan' at once. An' Deeck, he go upstairs to get his clo'es."

"Well?"

"We wait, an' he come not down. We go up to make search for him, an' fin' zat he has escape' by ze window, taking Madame wiz him."

"Mrs. Hayward!" I gasped. "How long ago was that?"

"Ten minutes. You can see, M'sieu'—zey are already searching."

I followed him out to the little path in front of the hut. Lights were moving across the southern ridge of rocks, along the seaward wall, down in the shadowy pasture-lands.

"The fools!" I snorted. "They'll scare them off with those lanterns! Is the boat guarded?"

"Yes, M'sieu'—by Bailey."

"Then they're still on the island. God grant we shan't be too late!"

I turned, and skirting the side of the hut, scrambled out on the long eastern arm of headland, while Pierre, calling something to the searchers in the low lands, ran back towards the house. The night was black and scowling, with heavy banks of cloud lying heaped up along the horizon edge. To the west and north the skies glowed with the quivering play of lightning; and now and then the low sullen growl of thunder drifted lazily to my ears. The breeze had dropped; and the hot moist air, cling-

ing to my face, was spent and lifeless. I was in a drip of perspiration when I gained the jutting point of the promontory, and paused to listen for any sound.

But, except for the threatening grumble in the distance, nothing broke the silence; even the murmuring lap of the waters against the cliffs below was stilled. I peered into the shadowy abyss for an instant; then slowly retraced my course, examining each rock and crevice as I went.

The lights of the other searchers, moving eastward in a long irregular line across the island, were abreast of me as I returned to my starting point. It was evidently the old man's intention to drive the fugitives into a corner. I fell in with his plan; keeping pace with the lanterns, and following the high curving wall of the northern shore.

The way was rough and full of pitfalls, with unexpected nooks and crannies, each of which must be explored. Thus it chanced that by the time I reached the rocky spur which formed the northeastern extremity of the island, the others had forged ahead, and, covering their allotted ground, were converging upon me in a dotted circle of light. I hastened my steps to catch up with them. And it was as I rounded the last boulder in my path that I ran straight into the arms of a man. We both started back.

"Dick!" I exclaimed.

He turned without answering, as though to slink away; but I caught him by the sleeve.

"Where is Mrs. Hayward?" I demanded.
"What have you done with her?"

"I don't know—nothing. How should I?"

"Didn't you help her to escape?"

"Of course not—I—the old man and I had a row——"

"So I've heard."

"Well, when I went upstairs to get my things she—she was just climbing out of the window; and I followed her. I'm looking for her myself."

His hesitating voice did not bear out the truth of his words. "I don't believe you," I said frankly.

He shrugged. "As you like. Hold on—there's no use going out there."

"Why?"

"I've been over the ground thoroughly."

"That's reason enough for me to go," I grunted, pushing by him, and scrambling out on the rocky spur.

He followed close upon my trail. As I skirted a group of boulders a white figure rose before me, and ran silently towards the brink of the cliff.

"Stop!" I cried, starting forward. "Mrs. Hayward! Stop!"

But before I could reach her Dick had flung himself upon me, sweeping me off my feet by the swiftness of his attack. I caught a glimpse of the crazy

woman tottering on the edge of the precipice, heard her wild laugh ring out on the air. Then the place where she had stood seemed suddenly to become vacant ; and I was fighting desperately for my own life on the narrow way.

CHAPTER XXIV

ON THE CLIFF

THE struggle was short but fierce. Dick, in attacking me from behind, had forced me up against a boulder; and thence, as I turned to face him, we had fallen to the rough shale of the pathway, locked in each other's embrace. Now he had me beneath him; and now I was on top. But, with each move, we drew nearer to the face of the cliff, until the ground began to slope away from under us, and I could feel the little cool draught of air which drifted up from the water below.

Great beads of perspiration stood out upon my forehead; the breath seemed to be driven from my body. I dug my heels into the loose earth, clutched vainly at the slipping stones and pebbles. Where were the others? Why didn't they come to my assistance? I tried to call, but whether I made any sound or not I do not know.

For a breathless instant we hung on the lip of the precipice. Then I caught the tread of hurrying footsteps; and with one last effort drove my fist into Dick's face. The blow blinded him. He threw his head back. And of a sudden his weight seemed to

be lifted from me. I clutched wildly at a thin outcropping of rock, and dragged myself away from the crumbling ledge. Mr. Hayward, holding Dick by the collar, was shaking him like a rat.

"Where is she?" the old man stormed. "Where is she, you damned scoundrel? If anything has happened to her I'll break every bone in your body. What's the matter with you? Can't you speak?"

He held his captive at arm's length, and surveyed him by the light of the lantern. Dick's face had gone ashen gray; and, as I scrambled to my feet, I could hear his teeth chattering.

"I—must have lost her," he whimpered. "She was here a minute ago. Then Renfrew came and attacked me——"

"It's a lie!" I cried wrathfully. "Mr. Hayward, that man let your wife throw herself over the cliff."

"I didn't," Dick broke in. "I——"

"Be silent!" the old man thundered. "Could you have stopped her?" he asked me.

"Easily."

"What happened?"

I told him.

"So that was the way of it?" His voice had suddenly lost its passion, was sunk to a threatening calmness. He turned a cold stare on Dick. "Is that the truth?"

The man struggled to answer; but the words seemed to stick in his throat.

Mr. Hayward smiled grimly. "Ah! I see it is," he said.

It was then that I became aware of the other searchers coming down the spur towards us. Mr. Hayward called to them to halt.

"Guard the path," he commanded; "and shoot if any one tries to get past. Where are the women?"

"Gone home," replied Anderson.

"Good. Stand back a little, Renfrew, and take the lantern. You can light him on his way."

He drew a revolver slowly from his hip-pocket. At sight of the weapon Dick found his voice.

"You've got no right to do this. It's unjust—in-famous. There's no proof whatever—except Renfrew's bare word——"

"That's sufficient—I think." The old man raised the revolver, and leveled it deliberately at Dick's head. "Now go," he said. "Go where you sent my wife—over the cliff."

The man, suddenly released, stared wildly about him, his eyes shifting from side to side as though seeking a road to escape. But the path was narrow, with a precipice on either hand; and Mr. Hayward held the shoreward road. The look of the hunted came into Dick's face. He stood motionless for an instant, then, poised on his toes, made a quick dive forward. The old man's revolver spat

viciously; and Dick fell back howling with pain. The bullet had clipped his ear.

Mr. Hayward drew a step closer; but it was evident that he was in no haste to bring the matter to an issue. A sardonic smile played about the corners of his mouth as he watched Dick's agonized glance.

"Why don't you go?" he sneered, taking another step forward. "Do you want more coaxing?"

Dick, retreating precipitately, crouched down in the shadow of a bowlder. "If I get out of this," he muttered, "I'll make you suffer."

"No fear of that, my boy. And, by the way, you should always stand when you're addressing your betters."

The revolver spoke again; and Dick limped to his feet with a curse.

"You fiend!" he hissed.

"Ah, indeed! Let me return the compliment." And the old man fired two more shots in quick succession, driving the other before him until Dick tottered on the brink of the cliff.

There was the sound of a commotion behind me; and, as I turned, a dim figure sped down the tongue of rock towards the two men. It was Sylvia.

"Father!" she cried, clutching the old man's arm. "Do you know what you're doing? This is murder!"

"No, girl. It's justice. Go back. This is no place for you."

But she clung to him persistently. "Stop! Stop! I beg of you—before it's too late!"

He threw her off roughly. "Renfrew, will you take charge of her?"

I ran over to them, and, catching Sylvia about the waist, drew her to one side. She struggled fiercely. Dick's eyes blazed with sudden fury as he saw her in my arms.

"By God!" he yelled, "I'll do for you, anyway!" And he leaped madly towards us.

But the revolver rang out once more; and he staggered back with a choking cry. His foot slipped over the shelving ledge of the precipice. He clawed the air blindly, striving in vain to throw his weight forward. Then, as the earth gave way beneath him, he flung his arms up despairingly, and, with one last scream of terror, disappeared from view.

For perhaps a moment the three of us stood rooted in breathless rigidity. Then a tongue of flame cleft the skies; the air was shattered by a deafening crash. The storm was upon us. Sylvia, dropping her head on my shoulder, broke into hysterical weeping.

A figure loomed at my elbow.

"Come," said Mr. Hayward quietly. "We must be getting home."

We found the two bodies early the next morning,

floating in the rocky shallows at the base of the cliffs. Mrs. Hayward's was brought ashore with some difficulty; and, while Pierre and Anderson bore it to the house, I set about the rescue of Dick's. But the old man absolutely forbade me to touch the corpse.

"He was worthless in life," he said harshly. "He's of no use now."

And, indeed, the task would have been a hopeless one; for the wind, veering with the turn of the tide, was now blowing sharply from the west, and the body, bobbing clumsily on the waves, slipped gradually off the jagged ledge into deep water. We watched it until it had sunk from view.

On the way home I was struck by a new phase which had appeared in Mr. Hayward's character. Innately cruel, with but little moral perception, as he had shown himself to be, there had always been a grain of kindness in him, a rough sense of justice which had cropped out at unexpected moments. And never had I known him to be cruel for the mere pleasure of it. What he had done had always been the passing result of some deeper calculation. He had simply not allowed any consideration for others to hinder the ultimate success of his schemes.

But now, after the events of the past night, it seemed as though this shadowy barrier of humanity had been swept away. The lust of killing was upon him. The beast in the man had come to the surface,

was leering in his face. He talked wildly, incoherently, of expeditions which had murder for their sole purpose. He would wipe out families, wreck towns, devastate cities. Dick was not alone to blame; the public itself was against him. He would be revenged upon the whole world for the death of his wife.

I tried to calm him; but my efforts seemed only to heighten his fury. His eyes flamed as he cursed me roundly for my interference; and I could see his fingers working nervously as though they longed to clutch me by the throat. He was mad, hopelessly mad, for the moment; the insanity which had brought Mrs. Hayward to her sad end seemed to have been communicated to him.

Nor was I the only one to be alarmed at his condition. Towards five o'clock Pierre came to me with the report that the old man, after raging about the house for hours, had locked himself in his room, where they could hear him pacing the floor like a caged lion. And when he did not appear at supper, both Wadsworth and Anderson declared openly that he had "gone daffy" beyond a doubt. His own misdeeds had returned upon his head a thousand-fold.

It was hard now to realize that he was the father of Sylvia. The girl, with her uprightness and sincerity, seemed to be as far removed from this insensate fiend as the two poles. And yet, from what

I had heard, I was convinced that Mr. Hayward had started life with all of the essentials of honesty and straightforwardness. His first false step might easily have been taken to save his family from ruin; but, once taken, he had no other course left him except that of crime. The line which determines whether a man shall turn out good or bad is often so slightly drawn that I could readily imagine how he had slipped over it almost without conscious knowledge. He had gone wrong from force of circumstances rather than from any innate sense of wickedness. There was consolation in the thought that Sylvia, with her father's example before her, would never be tempted to follow in his path.

I remained long at my window that night, watching the flickering lights of the coastwise vessels, and wondering anxiously why the aid which I expected from the mainland did not come.

CHAPTER XXV

THE MAN FROM MARTHA'S VINEYARD

THE next morning Mr. Hayward appeared to be more calm; but there was a brooding taciturnity about his manner which I did not like. He took his place at breakfast without so much as a nod to any one; and he sat through the meal in absolute silence, staring blankly when some one asked him a question, crushing any attempt at conversation with a scowling glance. I could see by the men's faces that they were anxious, troubled; and when we rose from table, and he left us, I think we all breathed a sigh of relief.

A hurried council of war, held upon the veranda, was productive of no result. Each man voiced his fears volubly; but when it came to laying out a plan of action we were one and all of us dumb. The old man's personality seemed to dominate everybody; the iron rule with which he had governed the island for years was not to be broken down in a day. We could only trust to providence—and wait.

Mrs. Hayward's funeral was fixed for that afternoon; and Wadsworth, as Mr. Hayward's right-hand man, had been chosen to look after the simple

preparations. I was therefore somewhat surprised when the old man sought me out about midday with the request that I read the prayers at the grave.

"You're the only one on the island who's fit to do it, Renfrew," he said gloomily. "The rest of us are all a pack of scoundrels at the best."

I began a weak denial; but he cut me short.

"You don't know what you're talking about, or you wouldn't speak like that. It was I who drove my poor wife crazy—I, and my crooked ways and companions. If I had led a straight life, she'd have been as sane as you are to-day. We're all guilty of her death—all, except you and Sylvia. And she has turned against me. You won't refuse me in this?" he begged; and there was a hint of menace in the pleading tones of his voice.

"I'll do my best," I returned. "But I'm afraid my recollection of the service——"

"I've brought you a prayer-book." He fumbled in his pocket. "It—it was among her things. God knows we've used it little enough on the island."

I took the book reverently.

"Thanks," he mumbled; and, as he turned away, he brushed his hand hurriedly across his eyes.

I was glad to see these signs of contrition. The wild ravings of yesterday had given place to a more human sorrow. Perhaps we had been unnecessarily alarmed.

It was three o'clock when the little procession, headed by Wadsworth and Anderson bearing Mrs. Hayward on a litter between them, topped the crest of the low eastern slope, and paused beside the open grave. Pierre and I, who had been waiting for them, stood aside while the men lowered the body into the ground; and, as the mourners grouped themselves about the shallow trench, I caught a glimpse of Sylvia's face. It was my first sight of her since the tragedy; and the changes which I noted were startling. The rosy flush of her cheeks had faded into an ashen pallor; deep lines drooped at the corners of her mouth; and in her hot, dry eyes there had come a strange look of mingled horror and aversion. My heart went out to her in her lonely grief; and when I read the service it was in a voice curiously shaken by emotion.

We stood in reverential silence while Pierre Bailey filled in the grave, then, with one accord turned slowly downwards across the pasture-lands. Mr. Hayward, lagging behind, offered his arm to Sylvia. But she shrank from him involuntarily; and he passed on with a gloomy shrug. I fell into step beside her.

As though by common impulse, we swung to the right, and, skirting the northern cliffs, climbed out on the eastern headland of the little harbor. The golden light of the afternoon, sifting through a bluish haze, swept the sea with its mellow glow; a

tinted cloud or two hung in bold relief above the horizon; and in the offing a tiny sail broke into a gleam of white as it caught the sun.

It was a time when nature was in no mood for sorrow; and the girl's slender figure in its tightly fitting dress of black, looked pathetically out of place against the colored splendor of the day. For a long while she stood motionless, gazing out across the water; and, as I watched, her eyes lost their hardness, grew dim and misty with longing. I touched her gently on the arm.

"You must try to bear it," I said. "It's hard, I know. But death is our common heritage, and——"

"Oh, it's not that—not that! I—I'm almost glad—for mother's sake—now that it's over. I'm just beginning to realize what a curse life must have been to her." She paused for an instant, then turned to me passionately. "Oh, can't you take me away from here—somewhere—anywhere? I feel as though I should die if I stayed in this place an hour longer. The whole island is tainted with death—the very air reeks with it! And when I shut my eyes the only thing I can see is Dick's tortured face as he slipped over the cliffs. I'll see it till I die."

"Don't! Don't!" I protested. "You're overwrought—worn out. When you've had time to rest——"

"Rest?" She laughed bitterly. "The power of

rest has gone from me. It went that—that night on the cliffs, when I learned what sort of man my father was!”

“He did only what he conceived to be his duty.”

“Ah, yes! I know. It may seem like that to you. But it’s different with me. You can’t understand my feelings. He was my father, and I always looked up to him and worshiped him as such. I’d heard that he was harsh, domineering, cruel; and lately, I’ve come to know a little of his—dishonest practices. But he was still my father, and I didn’t care. Then suddenly the mask dropped from his face, and I saw that what I had loved was a demon. And something broke inside me. I think I almost hate him now.”

“But he is still your father,” I argued; “and, what’s more, he’s half mad with grief. If you had heard him——”

“I have,” she interrupted, shivering. “All last night he walked up and down the hall, laughing and crying and muttering to himself. And once he stopped at my door, and asked for mother. And when I told him she wasn’t there, he swore at me frightfully, and warned me to look out, or I’d share her fate. It made my flesh creep to hear him.”

“He’s more quiet to-day.”

“Yes. But he has had the taste of blood—and

his hands are still stained with it." She turned with an appealing gesture. "Oh, isn't there something we can do—some way to escape?"

"I've tried hard enough, Heaven knows," I said mournfully. "And the last chance seemed the best of all."

"What was it?"

Under promise of secrecy, I told her of the message which I had sent by Manson. "But that was ten days ago, and nothing has happened. I'm afraid it's all up now."

She did not answer; and for a time we silently watched the yellow lights melt into the crimson glow of the sunset. Then, as we turned inland, the girl gave a low exclamation.

"Look!" she cried, pointing. "There's a boat putting in to the harbor! Perhaps they're coming at last!"

I followed the direction of her finger. The tiny sail which I had noted in the offing had crept in upon us unawares.

"One man in a catboat?" I sniffed. "Hardly!"

"Well, he's going to land, at any rate. We may as well see who it is." And she began to run along the cliffs towards the pathway.

I kept close to her heels.

As we clambered down the last turn, the man in the boat spied us, and waved his cap.

"It's Casey!" said Sylvia.

“Your father’s ‘man of business’ on Martha’s Vineyard?”

“Yes. I wonder what he wants?”

We reached the water’s edge as the boat ran her nose into the sand. Casey jumped briskly ashore.

“Where’s your father, Miss Sylvia?”

“Up at the house. Is anything the matter?”

“Well, rather! Somebody’s blown on the island, an’ the revenue chaps are after you, thick as fleas.”

CHAPTER XXVI

I COME TO GRIPS WITH MR. HAYWARD

It was in my mind to remain on the beach with Sylvia, and test the sailing qualities of the catboat as soon as we had sped Casey on his road to the house. But, as though he divined my intentions, the man curtly bade us precede him. We obeyed unwillingly enough. But, as we climbed the path I found a chance to whisper a few words of hope into Sylvia's ear; and, by the pressure of her hand in mine, I knew that she understood.

We found Wadsworth, Anderson, and Bailey lounging comfortably on the veranda. They started to their feet at our appearance; and Wadsworth, coming forward, met us at the top of the steps.

"By all that's mysterious, Casey! What are you doing here?"

"Just a little matter of business with th' boss. Where is he?"

"In the living-room. Anything gone wrong?"

"Anythin'? Everythin'. Keep an eye on my boat, will you, Bailey? The tide's risin', an' I'm afraid she may get afloat." He crossed the veranda. "See you later," he cried over his shoulder; and the door hid him from view.

We told the men what little we knew. Then Bailey sauntered over to the cliffhead, where he could watch the harbor; while the rest of us sat down to await developments. But it was a full half hour before the door opened again.

"Is Wadsworth there?" asked Mr. Hayward's voice.

"Yes. Do you want me?"

"Just for a minute."

Wadsworth scrambled up with alacrity, and disappeared through the doorway. Another quarter of an hour dragged slowly by. Then Casey emerged with a broad smile on his flushed face.

"It's your turn, Anderson."

"Did the old man ask f'r me?"

"You bet he did, an' he means t' have you, too."

"What's up?"

"It's past my knowin'. I'm out of it."

"Has he fired you?"

"Lord, no! I've fired myself. I know when I've had enough. See those?" He waved a bundle of papers. "We've had our final settlement—to date."

Anderson turned away with a peevish shrug. I watched him into the house out of the corner of my eye, then turned to Casey.

"Look here," I said in a low voice. "What will you take to put us ashore in your boat?"

"Us? Who?"

"Miss Hayward and I."

He gave vent to a fat chuckle. "Goin' to elope, hey? Of all the——"

"Certainly not," I broke in, frowning. "We're going, because—well, we have our reasons. I'll pay you well for your trouble."

But he shook his head. "I'd do it f'r nothin' if I did it at all. But I won't do it."

"Why?"

"Th' old man'd skin me alive if he found it out. He's already about as mad as——"

The door creaked open for the third time. "Ren-frew?" called Wadsworth.

"Guess I'd better clear out," said Casey, "before he drags *me* into the mess."

And, as he strode away, I threw a despairing glance at Sylvia, and went within.

There had been high words before I entered; and a sense of storm still hovered in the air. Anderson, sprawling in an easy-chair, scowled blackly at the ceiling. Mr. Hayward, with his chin sunk on his breast, sat at the center table, staring moodily before him. A brace of revolvers lay on the blotting pad within easy reach. I hesitated an instant, then, at a word from Wadsworth, walked deliberately up to the table. And, as I paused, the old man's eyes lifted to mine.

"Take a seat," he said brusquely.

I did so. Wadsworth moved quietly to his place

on a divan. I could hear Anderson drumming out a tune with his fingers on the arm of his chair. It was a long moment before Mr. Hayward spoke.

"You've probably heard the object of Casey's visit," he said incisively, "so I'll skip preliminaries. Suffice it to say that the government has got wind of us here, and is sending a revenue cutter to investigate. We may expect her arrival at any moment. Now, what I want to know is, who's responsible for this? Who has given us away?"

His eyes glowed with a somber light as he fixed them on my face. I stirred uneasily.

"Why do you ask me?"

"Because I believe you know something about it. We won't mince matters, Mr. Renfrew. There's a traitor here on the island, and I mean to ferret him out. A traitor!" he repeated with violence, bringing his fist down heavily on the table. "And by Heaven, I'll kill him!"

A momentary fire flashed into his eyes, then died again. He sat back into his chair, frowning angrily. Anderson, striking a match on his heel, lighted his pipe with easy indifference. I waited.

"I'm firmly convinced," Mr. Hayward went on, "that the man who has betrayed us used the yacht as a means of communication with the mainland. Now, to do that, he must have had exceptional opportunities. Pierre never left the motor-boat; so he is out of the question. Bailey, who was scarcely

out of my sight the whole time, is also exonerated. I've examined Wadsworth and Anderson, separately and together; and they've both given me satisfactory explanations. There remains only you——"

"And Dick," suggested Wadsworth.

"True enough," retorted the old man sternly. "And if he had done what I expected him to do on the yacht, this thing would probably never have happened. But we'll dispose of the living before we take up the dead. Now, Mr. Renfrew." He turned suddenly to me. "Will you please tell me what you were doing in the port passage?"

"What port passage?"

"On the *Iona*, of course."

"Oh! I was trying to hunt up the steward—to find out where Prescott's stateroom was."

"I'm referring to the time when you had just come *from* Prescott's stateroom—after Dick had shot him. If you will remember, I met you in the saloon."

He paused; and his hand, reaching out, played idly with one of the revolvers on the table. He had cornered me; and he knew it. I determined on a bold move.

"The steward was a friend of mine," I declared. "He had shipped with me once, on board the *Naravido*. I had taken the precaution of binding him on

my first visit; and after the fracas was over, I went back to let him loose.

"Very thoughtful, I'm sure."

I ignored the sarcasm. "He had given me valuable information."

"And what did you give him in return?"

"His liberty."

"Nothing more?"

"I thanked him."

"Ah! You had a little talk with him, then?"

"Just a few words—nothing of any consequence."

"Can you repeat them?"

"He reminded me that I had never treated him like that on the *Naravido*. I agreed with him, and suggested I had fallen rather low since then. He acknowledged the fact, but said that he did not believe I was really in with such a rough lot—that there was something queer about it—I use his own expressions——"

"You needn't apologize. What did you answer?"

"Nothing."

"Nothing? Isn't that rather strange? It must have occurred to you that if you gave him some hint of your position here, he would be apt to warn the authorities."

"Perhaps it did. But I didn't give him that hint."

"Did he suggest it of his own accord?"

"He did not."

"And you let the chance slip by?" His chin shot forward; and an ugly look came into his eyes. "Is that very likely, Mr. Renfrew?"

"If you doubt my word——"

"I don't. I admire your cleverness. You were evidently shrewd enough to know that the man would guess there was something wrong." He glanced at his two subordinates. "Gentlemen, I believe we have found how the story was carried to the mainland." And, raising the revolver, he leveled it full at my face.

Wadsworth sprang up with a curse, and caught the old man's wrist.

"Drop that!" he cried. "We've had too much shooting here already. You've got no proof——"

"That's what Dick said. But it didn't save him——"

"Well, it'll save Renfrew. You don't seem to realize what we're up against. We need every man on the island——"

But I had risen to my feet, and with a wave of my hand motioned Wadsworth aside.

"You may shoot me if you like," I said in a low tone, bending over the old man. "But I suppose you understand what you'll lose by killing me."

"Perfectly," he sneered. "A traitor, and an ounce or two of lead——"

"And \$50,000 worth of bonds."

He sat up with a jerk. "I have the order——"

"Which is in my name, and must be presented by me personally."

"You can indorse it."

"But I won't."

"Hm!" He bit his lip in perplexed silence.

"Shall I tell the others?" I glanced at the two men, who were eying us suspiciously. "They may be interested to know that you've kept the profits of this deal to yourself."

"No—no. You mustn't!" he said hurriedly. "They'd kill me if they thought I'd been cheating them." And then, in a louder voice: "Wadsworth is right," he declared, letting the revolver slip from his fingers. "We can't spare a single man. Mr. Renfrew, you may go."

I went with alacrity.

Sylvia was still waiting on the veranda. I gave her the details of the interview, glossing over her father's attempt on my life. But her intuition read the truth behind my words; and she broke in upon me suddenly.

"Why don't you say right out that he tried to kill you? I can stand it." She gave a hopeless sigh. "He has us at his mercy—every one of us. And there doesn't seem to be anything that we can do."

"Yes, there's one thing—if you're willing to take the risk." I looked cautiously about me. "No

one's watching. We might capture the motor-boat. It's too big for one to manage; but the two of us——"

She shook her head. "Pierre has walled up the landward passage."

"When?"

"A while ago. He told me just now."

"By your father's orders?"

"Naturally."

"Hm!" The action had a sinister aspect which I did not like. "I wonder what object he has in view?"

"I don't know."

We were still discussing the matter when Anderson, banging the living-room door behind him, strode towards us in a towering rage.

"Of all th' stubborn jackasses!" he growled. "What d' you think th' old man's done now? Locked up the passage t' th' motor-boat, an' stuck th' key into his pocket! Says we're t' stay here an' fight them revenue chaps till we lick 'em. Won't even give us a chance t' run away. Us six men against th' American navy! Bah! That's not a scrap—that's suicide."

He stamped noisily down the steps. Sylvia and I exchanged meaning glances. I saw my own thought reflected in her eyes.

"How did Mr. Hayward act?" I asked Anderson. "Was he calm, or——"

"Calm? He's about as calm's a West Indian cyclone. Go in and look at him. He's layin' into Wadsworth now. Oh, an' I forgot! You're t' shut up that toy house o' yours, an' come down here t' live. Guess he wants t' keep his eye on you for a while."

By the time I had returned from the hut, with my scanty belongings done up in a bundle, and the bonds safely stowed away in an inside pocket, the preparations for defense had already begun. The veranda had been stripped of its easy-chairs; and Wadsworth and Anderson were busily closing up the lower windows with heavy iron shutters, pierced with long loop-holes. Pierre hacked viciously at the dense clump of shrubbery which stood before the steps.

"So zey will have nozzing to hide behin'," he informed me as I paused beside him.

"Where's Ma'mselle?" I asked.

"In ze living-room—cleaning ze guns."

I passed up the steps and into the house. Sylvia, seated in the full glow of a lamp behind the long center table, looked up from a veritable arsenal of rifles and revolvers.

"You're to help me, I believe," she said, making room by her side.

"This is nice work for a girl," I snorted angrily.

"I chose it myself," she returned. "I had to do

something, or I'd have gone mad." She gave the finishing touches to a shining barrel. "If we only knew how it would end!" she sighed.

"If I had a few cartridges I could soon tell you how it would end," I said savagely. "But I suppose he has locked the magazine up."

"Yes. It's not to be opened till the last moment."

"Where is he now?"

"On the rocks with Bailey, keeping watch."

— The men, dropping in one by one, drew up their chairs to the table, and fell to work upon the guns. Outside the mellow summer twilight deepened slowly into night. There was a long silence, broken only by the soft swish of the chamois skins against the burnished metal, and the occasional click of a hammer. Then, as the ship's clock in the corner rasped out four bells, hurried footsteps sounded on the veranda; and Bailey's head appeared through the open door.

"She's sighted," he announced excitedly, "bearin' down from the nor'west'ard! In another hour she'll be close inshore."

CHAPTER XXVII

THE LANDING PARTY.

WE found the old man pacing restlessly to and fro along the line of cliffs which clambered up from the back of the house. He paused as we came in sight, and waved his hand dramatically to a group of lights swinging towards us across the dark sea.

"There she is!" he cried; and his voice rang exultantly. "She's big enough to wipe out the whole island. We're going to have a battle royal before we're through." He clapped me on the shoulder. "Your friends have done nobly, Mr. Renfrew. I think we ought to send them a vote of thanks."

I turned away without answering, and joined Sylvia. The old man, breaking into an uncanny chuckle, strode through the silent group of his followers, and left us to ourselves. The girl shivered.

"That's the way he went on last night."

"The mood may leave him," I suggested soothingly. "It did before."

"But it won't now. Did you see his eyes glitter when he spoke of fighting? The mere thought of killing seems to turn his brain."

"We can only hope for the best," I said, with what assurance I could muster.

But she refused to be comforted. "Yes. The worst is not to be thought of." And she moved slowly away down the rocky path.

I followed her to a secluded nook between two boulders; and for a long time we sat watching the approaching vessel. Now and then the crunch of Mr. Hayward's footsteps floated to our ears, or, more rarely, a snatch of conversation. But for the most part the silence was unbroken. I felt instinctively that the others shared our dread.

The cutter held straight on her course for the island until she was some three hundred yards distant. Then, swerving sharply to starboard, she hove to.

"What are they doing?" asked Sylvia.

"Probably lowering a boat."

But it was the old man who set us right. "Heads down!" he cried suddenly.

And, as we ducked, a stream of light, shooting out from the vessel, flashed across the darkness. They had brought their searchlight into play.

For perhaps ten minutes the blinding glare swept the cragged walls of rock, pausing to explore the deep cuts and fissures, running swiftly over the smooth face of the cliffs. Then it shifted to the higher ridges which screened the house; and the cutter, getting under way again, passed out of sight around the western point.

"Come!" said Mr. Hayward. "We must see

what they're up to." And, with the men behind him, he disappeared down the path.

Sylvia and I rose to our feet; and, tracing the boat by the glow of her light, followed her in her leisurely scrutiny of the island. She halted for a brief space abreast of the northern headlands, and, again, for a longer period, opposite the entrance to the harbor. Then, apparently satisfied, she drew out beyond the Darning Needle, and cast anchor. The searchlight flickered out as we turned downwards towards the house.

Bailey met us on the veranda.

"Where's Mr. Hayward?" I asked.

"Down on the beach with Anderson. You two'd better get into th' house."

"Has anything happened?"

"How do I know?" he sneered. "Th' old lunatic didn't say."

It was the spirit of mutiny beginning to show itself. Even Pierre, busily arranging the weapons on the tables which had been drawn up before the loop-holed windows, seemed to have come under its influence.

"Zere is no sense in fighting eef you can't run away," was the burden of his philosophy.

"Then you wouldn't mind clearing out if it came to the pinch?"

"Jus' watch me, M'sieu'!"

"On the contrary, you had better watch me."

I spoke the words in jest; but he appeared to take them seriously.

"Do you mean——"

"He's only joking, Pierre," cut in Sylvia; and then, in an aside to me: "Be careful! Wadsworth's listening!"

I glanced over at the man lolling in an easy-chair. There was an amused smile on his face.

"If you'll find a way to escape, Renfrew, we'll all watch you," he observed.

"I'll let you know when I do," I retorted with a sour grin.

His brow clouded into an ugly scowl; but I pretended not to notice it. It would have been the height of folly to pick a quarrel with him then.

"You'd better get some sleep," I said to Sylvia. "Nothing is likely to happen to-night."

"Wait!" she cautioned.

And, as though to belie my words, the sound of running feet came along the path outside. There was an instant's parley with Bailey on the veranda; then Mr. Hayward burst into the room.

"Where's Anderson?" he demanded. "I sent him up here to warn you."

"You did? Well, he never showed up," said Wadsworth grumpily. "What's wrong?"

"They're landing a boat on the beach. Curse him! If he's sneaked off——"

The old man swung back towards the doorway as Bailey slipped across the threshold.

"Get back," the fisherman cried. "They're comin' up the path in droves."

"Put out the lights!" I called to Sylvia.

And, while Bailey and Wadsworth barred the door, I ran to the nearest loop-hole and peered through.

It was as Bailey had said. Some twenty men had already climbed the cliffs, and, forming into a compact body, were advancing silently upon the house. As they approached the veranda they deployed on either hand, and grounded arms. Their officer, stepping back a pace, studied the front windows curiously; then, with military precision, strode briskly up the steps. There was a ringing knock at the door.

"Who is it?" demanded the old man.

"Ensign McCarty, of the *Alert*, Lieutenant Lacey commanding."

"What do you want?"

"We're looking for a man named Morton Renfrew. It has been reported——"

"So we've heard. That's why we're prepared."

"Do you refuse to give him up then?"

"Absolutely."

The officer hesitated. "Mr. Renfrew?" he called.

Some one crept up to me in the darkness.

"Take care!" the old man whispered; and the cold muzzle of a revolver pressed against my shoulder blade.

I was silent.

Mr. Hayward chuckled. "You see!" he cried to the officer. "He doesn't answer."

"Yes," retorted the other sternly. "And I intend to see why he doesn't answer." He crossed the veranda and gave an order to his men. "This is my last warning," he announced curtly.

A flash of fire leaped out from the loop-hole; and one of the figures on the lawn sank limply to the ground.

"And that's mine," returned the old man.

There was a low growl of anger from the sailors outside. But McCarty, running down the steps, said something which seemed to quiet them; and they drew off slowly, carrying their fallen comrade in their midst.

"The war has begun," declared Mr. Hayward with a grim laugh.

"Yes, worse luck to it!" Bailey's grumble sounded ominous in the darkness. "You damned fool! Haven't you more sense 'an t' shoot 'em down like that?"

"Have you anything to say against it?"

"Have I? If I talked a month I wouldn't be half through."

The old man brushed by me angrily. "Well, suppose you talk for a minute, then. That's long enough for me to size up your opinions. I've got four cartridges left."

It was Wadsworth who saved the situation.

"Better keep them for the revenue chaps," he put in coolly. "Here, Bailey, quit your fooling, and take the loop-hole next to Renfrew. You'll be out of danger over there."

Bailey obeyed with a sulky air, muttering to himself as he shuffled to his place at the window nearest the harbor side. Even then, when the spirit of rebellion was in the wind, the old man's authority over his men was unshaken. They might growl and complain, but they did what he ordered them to do without question. It was the force of habit, perhaps—a sort of hypnotic paralysis—occasioned by a wholesome dread of consequences. Mr. Hayward knew his power, and used it ruthlessly. And it was to this, and to his prompt action in moments of crisis, that he owed his life during the earlier hours of the battle.

Bailey's impotent grumblings bore out my thoughts; and I smiled to myself, as I watched him staring peevishly through his loop-hole. I stood between him and the others, who held the upper end of the room. The rear of the house had been left unguarded. But, as the only approach to it was by the front, Mr. Hayward evidently believed that we

commanded the strategic position. The fallacy of his belief was soon to be proved.

A long period of silence had followed the altercation; and I was beginning to wonder whether the besiegers had not withdrawn entirely, when a faint rustle, twice repeated, rose from the corner of the veranda outside the window where Bailey watched. I glanced through my loop-hole, but could distinguish nothing.

Bailey heard the movement. "It's a bit of paper, blowin' along th' porch."

"I don't see it anywhere."

"You can't. It's down here—close to th' house."

"Oh!" I put my ear to the loop-hole, and listened intently. It seemed as though I could catch the low murmur of a voice.

"Some one's talking now," I declared.

"Where?"

"In the shrubbery, along the side of the veranda."

"Bah! That's only th' wind."

"What's the matter?" demanded Mr. Hayward sharply.

"Nothin'," answered Bailey. "Renfrew's just lost his nerve. Thought a piece o' paper on the porch was a ghost. Now he thinks he hears it whisperin' in th' bushes. It's the wind risin'—that's all."

The words, calculated to cast a slur on my courage, had their effect. Wadsworth laughed mali-

ciously; even the old man gave vent to a disdainful grunt. I allowed the matter to pass in angry silence: the house might be blown up before I warned them again.

For perhaps ten minutes the staccato tick of the ship's clock was the only sound in the room. Then Bailey, turning from his window, crept over to my side.

"Got anythin' t' drink about you?"

"No; I haven't."

"Hm! I'm as dry 's a bone."

"Ask the old man," I suggested acridly.

"Not me! One scrap a day with him's enough."

I made no answer; and, after an instant's pause, he returned to his place. Another five minutes dragged by.

"Look here, Renfrew," he whispered at last, "I can't stand it any longer. Just keep an eye on my window while I go out t' th' kitchen an' get a drink."

I muttered some reply; and he stole off quietly into the gloom. His elaborate precaution seemed suspicious; and I was on the point of following him, when a muffled crash sounded from the dining-room. He had overturned a chair.

"What's that?" burst out the old man.

"Bailey," I answered. "He's getting a drink in the kitchen."

"Without permission? Take Wadsworth and go after him at once."

We left him cursing softly to himself, and stumbled through the dining-room to the kitchen door. As I was about to push it open Wadsworth laid a hand on my arm.

"Listen!" he muttered.

Not a sound came from within. I peered cautiously through a crack. The room was empty.

"The bird has flown."

Wadsworth pushed by me across the threshold. "He's gone, all right," he agreed, pointing to an open window; and then, in a sharp whisper: "Keep down!"

I dropped to my hands and knees. A vague hum of voices floated in to us from outside. Wadsworth beckoned; and we moved over slowly to the wainscoting beneath the sill.

"I thought you hadn't heard my signal," Anderson was saying.

"I heard it, good enough," Bailey returned. "An' so did that fool Renfrew. We'd better get a hustle on, or they'll be down on us before we've finished."

Their voices sank to a murmur of undertones; and for the next few moments some mysterious occupation near the wall to the left of the window seemed to absorb their entire energies. I could make out nothing of what they were doing.

"Here goes for a look," I muttered, rising to my knees.

But Wadsworth motioned me down. "Not yet! Be quiet!"

Anderson was again speaking. "It's already trained on th' house, I tell you."

"But how did they get it up?"

"By a pulley, rigged out over the cliff. With that in front, an' this behind, there's about as much chance for th' old man an' th' rest of 'em as for the devil in heaven. Got everythin' ready?"

"All but the light."

"That's easy fixed. An' th' wind's in th' right direction, too."

The pungent odor of kerosene drifted in through the window.

"They're firing the house!" I exclaimed.

But Wadsworth, springing to his feet, had already vaulted over the sill. I followed in time to see him pursuing Bailey and Anderson into the darkness. Then a sudden glare filled the night; and, as I turned, the wall of the house burst into a sheet of flame.

I caught up a stick, and, plunging through the heavy smoke, attacked the crackling heaps of underbrush which had been piled along the stone foundations. But the fire, fed by the oil-soaked wood, had gained almost instant headway; and, as I kicked and stamped at the burning embers, little tongues of flame began to run up the clapboards towards the eaves.



Without water I could do nothing. I staggered back, half stifled by the heat, as Wadsworth, driving Bailey before him, reappeared.

"Stand by when I pass you the bucket," I panted, climbing through the window.

"Not by a damned sight," he retorted, following me over the sill, and dragging Bailey in after him. "They're lined up on the rocks out there, ready to shoot."

"But we can't let the house burn down."

"We've got to take chances. Hear that?"

A gun flashed in the darkness; and I could feel the slight jar as the bullet embedded itself in the window sash.

"What did I tell you?" he went on. "They'll soon make it too hot for us here. We'd better clear out."

But now it was Bailey who hung back. "They've got th' front covered, too," he whined. "They'll kill us like rats."

"That's all right," said Wadsworth cheerfully, marching him off. "The old man'll arrange to have you killed first."

We found the living-room in a state of excitement. One of the lamps had been relighted; and Sylvia and her father, aided by the two frightened servants, were hurriedly loading the weapons on the tables beside the windows. Pierre kept watch at a loop-hole.

The old man paused at our entrance. "Well?"

"They've set the kitchen afire," reported Wadsworth.

"Who?"

"Bailey and Anderson."

"Where's Anderson?"

"Skipped."

The old man's face grew distorted with rage. He reached out his hand for a revolver. But before he could level it there came a sudden rush of feet up the veranda steps.

"Look out!" cried Pierre.

And, as he spoke, the door groaned beneath a crashing blow.

CHAPTER XXVIII

THE ATTACK

"To your places!" thundered the old man. "And shoot to kill! You, too!" He urged on the reluctant Bailey with the butt of his revolver. "I'll take care of your case later on."

As I stumbled to my window the screaming women fled past me towards the rear of the house. I caught Sylvia's arm.

"Get them into the storeroom, and keep them there. If I see any chance of escape, I'll come for you."

She ran off to obey the order. I turned to my loop-hole. The sailors, falling back to the edge of the veranda, were poising the heavy spar which they carried in preparation for another attack. Mr. Hayward's revolver spat into the gloom; and one of the men dropped. With a cry of fury the others hurled the battering-ram against the door, splintering the lower panels with the force of the blow.

The old man sprang behind the center table. "Fire, you damned cowards!" he shouted, covering us with his weapon. "Fire, or I'll shoot!"

"Hanged if I will!" muttered Bailey truculently.

"You'd better," I warned him, "like I do—in the air."

Pierre and Wadsworth had already opened a hot fusillade upon the besiegers. We followed them with scattering shots.

For a few moments the sailors withstood the shower of bullets bravely, struggling to force an entrance through the shattered door. Then, as one after another fell before the deadly fire, they broke in disorder, leaving their stricken comrades in a ghastly heap upon the porch.


I lowered my rifle with a sigh of relief. The first skirmish was over; and my hands were still unstained by blood.

The old man returned to his window. "We've done for them this time," he cried exultantly. "Perhaps they won't be so reckless again."

A stifled groan went up from the shambles outside; and one of the wounded began to babble childishly.

Mr. Hayward gave a cruel laugh. "Stow that gab," he jeered. "You'll have time enough to talk in hell."

Bailey cursed volubly under his breath. Even the stolid Wadsworth seemed to be shaken. I glanced about the room to satisfy myself that Sylvia had not heard her father's words. And it was then that I noticed the thick clouds of smoke pouring through the dining-room door.



"Look!" I said, clutching the old man's arm.
"We must do something, or we'll be hemmed in."

He shrugged. "What if we are? We can still move out on the veranda."

"But we won't," I protested.

"Why not—if I wish it?" He shot his head forward, a belligerent light springing into his eyes.
"Why not?"

"Because I've had enough of murder." I raised my gun threateningly. "Give me the key to the passageway."

But he swept the weapon out of my grasp. "What right have you to give orders?" he cried, breaking into an angry laugh. "Back to your place, where you belong! And you, too!" he roared, swinging on Bailey, who had crept up behind me. "You treacherous hound! For a cent I'd settle my score with you now."

Bailey started forward; but I laid a restraining hand upon his arm. Mr. Hayward eyed us with sneering disdain, and my anger crumbled beneath the cold power of his glance. He smiled as he calmly reloaded his revolver. Then, turning, he strode over to his coign of vantage behind the table.

"Now!" muttered Bailey, jerking away his arm.

"No!" I whispered. "We must wait!"

The old man sank into his chair with a warning look. Bailey lowered his rifle.

"But if I ever get th' chance again——"

His words were cut short by a long, crackling volley from outside; and a veritable rain of bullets pelted against the front of the house.

"Th' Gatlin'-gun!" he gasped, as we stole to our loop-holes. "We're done, f'r sure!"

And, indeed, it appeared so. The gray-black mass of the hut, set upon the low rise before us, seemed to belch forth flame. For an instant I gaped stupidly at the vivid flashes, my senses stunned by the storm of shots which rattled against the walls like hail. Then the old man's voice rang out above the din; and, lifting my rifle mechanically, I fired.

It was like using a pea-shooter against a giant. A derisive howl went up from the men who were serving the gun. The sound roused Mr. Hayward to frenzy; and when Bailey, his forehead bleeding from a flesh wound, turned sullenly from his window, the old man drove him back at the point of his revolver.

"If you move again, you're a dead man!" he screamed. "A dead man!" And his voice was lost in the shriek of the bullets outside.

For some five minutes longer the ridiculous warfare continued; and, as we fought, the soft hiss of the flames behind us broke into a sinister roar. A lurid glare swept through the smoke-ridden atmosphere; and the fire, seizing upon the dining-room, reached out hungrily through the doorway. We began to choke in the stifling heat.

A wild craving for life possessed me. I threw a

searching glance at Mr. Hayward; and again his crazy indifference to our peril made my blood boil. I raised my gun; but, before I could train it upon him, Bailey gave a sudden cry of surprise.

"Look! They're sendin' somebody t' talk to us!"

And, as I dropped the rifle hastily, I noticed that the crackling volleys of the Gatling-gun had ceased.

"Who is it?" demanded Mr. Hayward.

"I dunno. Wait till he gets nearer."

I turned again to my loop-hole. A dim figure, barely discernible in the first gray pallor of the dawn, was advancing slowly across the open space in front of the house. Other figures were vaguely outlined on the rise behind him; and by their gestures, and his cautious, halting gait, I gathered that he needed continual urging on. At some twenty paces from the veranda he stopped.

"By Heavens! It's Anderson," laughed Wadsworth, "carrying a flag of truce!"

"Anderson?" echoed the old man, running to his window. "Then luck's still with us!"

Bailey's rifle clicked softly in the gloom.

"House ahoy!" shouted Anderson, waving his white flag.

"What do you want?" stormed the old man.

Anderson looked apprehensively over his shoulder.

"The cap'n sent me t' learn if you're ready t' come out. He says——"

"I'll tell him myself when we're ready. As for you——"

A flash of fire burst from the loop-hole. Anderson threw up his hands with a low moan, then, spinning on his heel, fell face downward upon the ground.

There was a slight movement behind me; and, as I turned, a second report, mingling with the other, rang in my ears. The old man reeled back from the window, his hand pressed tightly against his breast. I caught him in my arms.

"You devil!" he gasped, trying to level his revolver at Bailey. "You devil! you've killed me! I——"

But a flow of blood choked his utterance; and his head fell limply against my shoulder. I lowered him gently to the floor.

Bailey, clubbing his rifle, rushed towards us. I wrenched the revolver from Mr. Hayward's stiffening grasp.

"Stand back!" I shouted. "Can't you see he's dying?"

"Good enough f'r him! He killed my shipmate," the other sputtered, aiming a murderous blow at the old man's head.

I fired; and he dropped the gun with a howl of pain.

"Keep your distance," I warned him, "or you'll get another."

He retreated sullenly. I was glancing about the room for Pierre, when Wadsworth loomed out of the smoke.

"Where's the key?" he demanded.

"I haven't found it yet."

"I'll hunt for it, then, while you——"

"No, you won't," I objected. "I'll hunt for it myself."

He glared at me blackly; then, as he saw my hostile frown, his scowl melted into an indulgent smile.

"All right—go ahead. I'll see that this beast doesn't bother you."

I knelt beside the old man, and began to search his pockets. A vague appeal seemed to flutter in his glazing eyes. I bent over him.

"In the trousers!" he whispered brokenly. "And—for God's sake—take Sylvia—with you. Don't trust—the men——" His jaw dropped open in sudden horror. "Look out!" he panted, raising himself by a supreme effort. "Look out! They've covered you——" And, as I sprang to my feet, he fell back dead.

Wadsworth and Bailey grinned maliciously at me from behind their guns. But my glance, slipping past them, lighted on a familiar figure, creeping up stealthily in their rear.

"Hand it over," Wadsworth commanded, "or we'll make it hot for you."

I gave a slight gesture, and the figure drew nearer.

"Hand it over!" growled Bailey.

I came forward slowly. "You've got me," I confessed, tendering the key in my outstretched palm.

Bailey lowered his rifle to take it. I swung on him suddenly.

"Now, Pierre!"

And, as the Frenchman caught Wadsworth about the throat, I thrust Bailey's gun aside, and landed a smashing blow on his chin. He went down like a shot.

"To the storeroom!" I cried, clearing the old man's body. "Don't wait to finish him!"

There was the sound of a heavy fall; and Pierre stumbled after me through the blinding smoke. Sylvia met us on the threshold.

"Where's father?"

"Dead. Bailey shot him." I forced the key into her hand. "Take the women down the passage. We'll follow."

The sharp crack of a rifle rang out above the roar of the flames. Pierre caught my arm as the bullet whistled by us.

"Quick, M'sieu—he's coming!"

I banged the door shut; and an instant later Wadsworth crashed against it.

CHAPTER XXIX

HOMeward HO!

I HELD the door while Pierre bolted it; then, turning, we dashed through the darkness to the entrance of the cave. As we sped down the passage the Gatling-gun recommenced its firing.

"Poor devils!" I muttered.

"Poor nozzings, M'sieu'. Zey would haf done ze same to you—an' worse."

The women were already on the motor-boat. Sylvia cast off the lashings as we jumped on board.

"I'll take care of the wheel," I told her. "You and the women had better go below with Pierre. There may be shooting if the revenue cutter discovers us."

"But they'll stop as soon as we give ourselves up."

"We can't give ourselves up—not with Pierre on board. They'd arrest him. We must run for New Bedford and lose him somewhere on shore."

The girl nodded. "Go down into the cabin," she said to the servants. "I'll stay on deck."

"But, Sylvia——"

"Don't argue, or I shall become obstinate," she interrupted with a faint smile.

We made the seaward passage in safety, and laid our course northwestwardly by Gay Head. The dawn was still only a gray streak along the horizon; and the low mist which drifted over the dark face of the waters, hid us completely from sight. As we drew out from the island the staccato crackle of the Gatling-gun again came sharply to our ears.

"Why don't those fools surrender?" I muttered peevishly.

"Perhaps they're beyond it," returned Sylvia. "Look at that."

I glanced behind me. The house had fallen in with a resounding crash; and a great tongue of flame, shooting suddenly upwards, brought the cliff-head into vivid relief. The sputter and roar of the blaze sounded clear above the firing. I turned away with a shiver; but Sylvia continued to gaze at the angry splash of light until it had faded from view.

We had rounded Gay Head before she spoke again.

"Tell me about father," she said, sinking down on the deck beside me.

"Hadn't we better wait?" I suggested.

"No. I would rather know everything—now."

I gave her the brief details of what had happened.

"I suppose it was for the best," she said quietly, when I had finished. "He would never have been

happy——” She turned her head from me; and I saw her lips begin to tremble.

“He died as he wished to die,” I said gently.

“Yes. And I shall always remember that his last thought was for me.”

For a while the bubbling chatter of the water in the forefoot alone broke the silence. The dim shoreline of Cuttyhunk rose slowly out of the dusk before us. A saffron tint quivered along the eastern skies.

“My sister in New York will be glad to look after you,” I began tentatively.

“Oh, there’s no need of that. I’ve friends in New Bedford—a schoolmate—who will take me in for a few days.”

“And then?”

She shrugged. “I must find some occupation. I can sew a little, and——”

“Don’t, Sylvia!” Her words, with their note of resignation, wrung my heart. “Don’t! Please don’t!” And I caught her hand in mine.

A startled look swept across her face. But the love which I had guarded in silence was surging within me; and for a long moment I held her glance with the force of my own.

She read in my eyes what I dared not utter; and when she spoke it was in a beseeching voice.

“Not now, Morton. Later on, perhaps. But—not now.”

She withdrew her hand gently. I gazed ahead over the dawn-colored waters. She touched me on the arm.

"You can wait, can't you, Morton?"

"Wait, Sylvia? I can wait forever."

She smiled at my rashness. "It won't be as long as that."

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We crept up New Bedford harbor as the morning broke. I rang for half speed, and, heading in-shore, ran alongside of the first deserted wharf. Sylvia made the boat fast while I routed Pierre and the servants out of the cabin.

"I'm afraid we're rather a seedy crew to be roaming about a city," I said ruefully, as we turned up along the water front.

"It's early yet," returned the girl. "We may escape notice." She glanced back at the others following us. "I can look after the women," she continued. "But in Pierre's case——"

"I'll take care of that," I put in. "He'll go with me to New York."

It appeared, however, that the Frenchman had his own ideas on the subject. As we came to the busier shipping centers, he halted suddenly.

"Wait, M'sieu'," he said, darting across the street towards a trim bark which was making ready to leave.

He spoke a few words to a man leaning over the bulwarks, then came back to us.

"Eet is fix'," he announced. "In an hour I sail for New Zealan', where ze police cannot reach me. One of ze men is seeck, an' ze captain is glad to take me on." He hesitated, his rugged face twitching with emotion. "Goo'-by, M'sieu'—Ma'mselle! You haf taught me what eet is to be good—to live hones'ly—an', by God, I'll do eet!"

He wrung our hands in fervent gratitude.

"God bless you, Pierre," I said brokenly.

Sylvia was on the verge of tears.

With moist eyes we watched him clamber over the side of the vessel, then went on slowly along the awakening harbor front. I paused when we came to the point where our roads divided.

"Is it good-by for me, too?" I asked, taking her hand.

Her fingers tightened in my grasp. "No—no! I thought it was best on the boat—but it isn't. You mustn't leave me—now."

We turned in silence, and together climbed up the narrow way into the town.

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